Commentary

February 1997

On the Future of Conservatism

A Symposium

Robert L. Bartley • Peter L. Berger • Walter Berns • William F. Buckley, Jr.
Midge Decter • David Frum • Francis Fukuyama • Mark Helprin
Gertrude Himmelfarb • William Kristol • Michael Novak • Norman Podhoretz
Irwin M. Stelzer • George Weigel • Ruth R. Wisse

Genesis and the Talking Heads
Hillel Halkin

Republicans for Quotas
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Reading Closely Again
Christopher Clausen

Lights, Camera, Shakespeare
Donald Lyons

Books in Review
Mark Falcoff • Joseph Shattan • Leslie Lenkowsky
Marshall J. Breger • Josef Joffe

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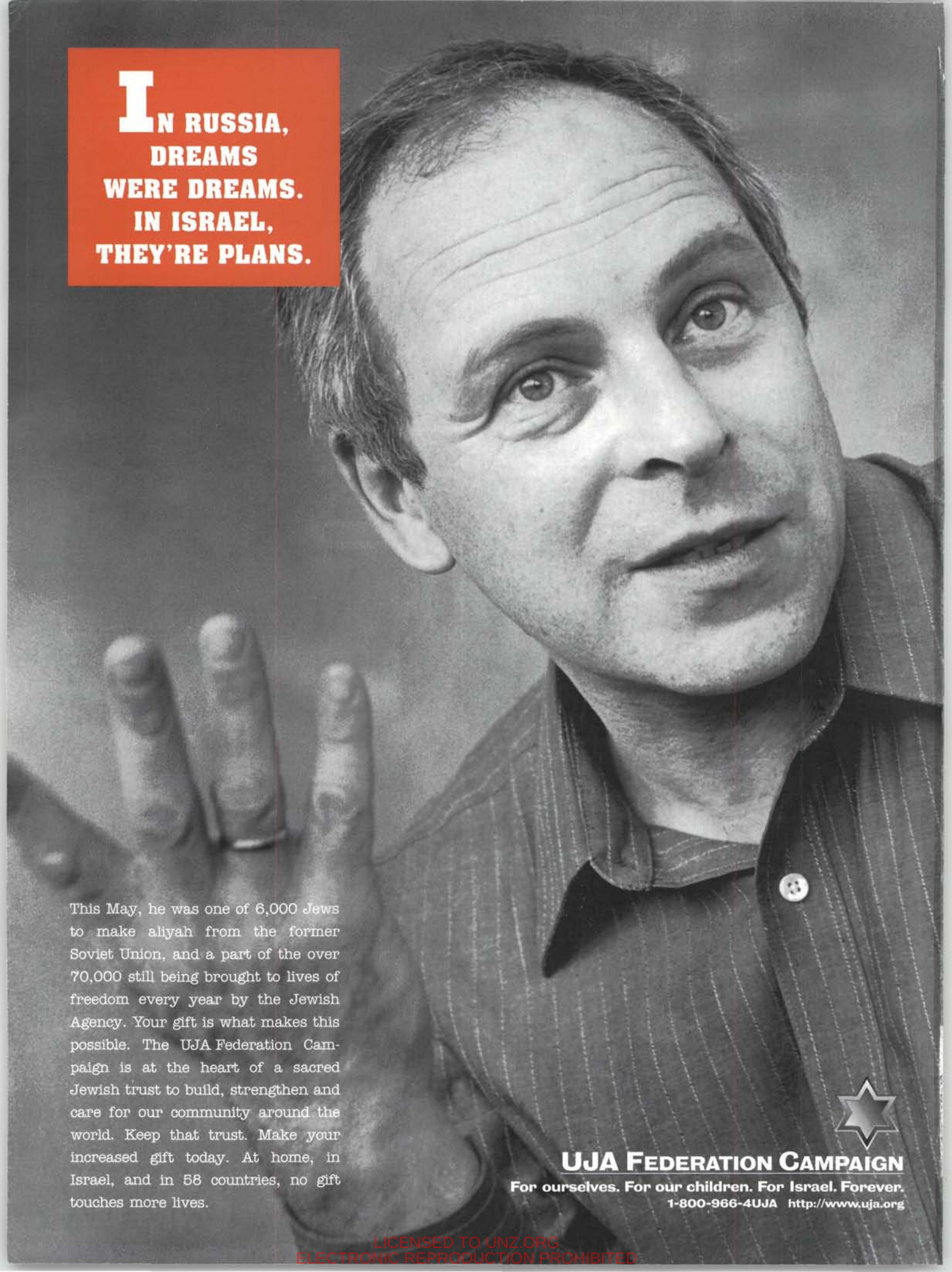
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Commentary
February 1997

Letters from Readers

Defense

To the Editor:

In their article about anti-military bias in the media with regard to spending, "The Anti-Defense League" [November 1996], Joshua Muravchik and Lawrence F. Kaplan assert that because the press, in their view, misstated the levels of military spending in past administrations, press reports that defense spending is being protected today are no longer credible. But the truth is that Messrs. Muravchik and Kaplan are simply wrong.

The first and most important point to remember, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, is that the cold war is over. Thus, to imply that military spending today is lower than it was during the Reagan administration while the cold war was ongoing, and that this reduction adversely affects national security, is just plain silly. Since there is simply no threat comparable to the Soviet-bloc forces of the past, there is no reason to expect that overall U.S. military spending should remain at levels comparable to what it was then. Yet they persist in talking about a "decline," as if peak Reagan-era levels should forever be the baseline for judging military spending.

Second, if the media periodically do overstate military spending, writers like Messrs. Muravchik and Kaplan understate it. For example, they usually do not include Department of Energy military programs, foreign military aid, military space programs, military retirement pay, veterans' benefits, or the military share of interest on the debt. In FY 1996 that total was an estimated $494 billion, and $485 billion in the original FY 1997 Clinton administration budget request.

Third, while domestic discretionary spending may be higher overall today than it was during the Reagan years, it still pales in comparison with military spending as a share of overall discretionary spending, the money the President and Congress must decide on and allocate each year. In the Clinton administration's original FY-1997 budget proposal, the national-defense category of federal spending (excluding veterans' programs and other related military spending) totaled 51 percent of all discretionary spending.

It should be noted that the authors confuse the issue by mentioning an 8-percent increase in Social Security as well as other entitlement spending such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and federal retirement programs. But this is mandatory spending, money the federal government spends automatically unless the laws governing it are changed. When all this is taken into account, the amount of the true increase in discretionary spending is significantly less than what the authors indicate.

Fourth, by focusing on issues like the level of military spending versus spending on domestic social programs, the authors avoid the real question. The issue is not whether the Pentagon received more than the Department of Health and Human Services; it is whether funding for the Pentagon is justified and well spent. There is reasonable evidence to suggest it is not. For example, spending on weapons procurement is slated to increase by about 40 percent between 1997 and 2001. One rationale frequently proffered as justification for the increase is to maintain dominance over "likely future adversaries." But the United States faces no such danger. In 1996 the U.S. will spend more than twice as much on its military as the combined total of potential adversaries: China, Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, North Korea, Cuba, and Libya.

The Pentagon plans to procure weapons like the $74-billion F-22, original-

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ly conceived to counter future Soviet aircraft which will now never be built. No countries are developing aircraft that will even approach America's extensive air-combat capabilities. The $71-billion New Attack Submarine program is equally unjustified. There are currently no countries developing new submarine technology that comes anywhere near existing U.S. capabilities.

The media can be faulted for irresponsible or biased reporting and editorializing, but if their article is any example, Messrs. Muravchik and Kaplan can be faulted for the same thing.

DAVID ISENBERG
Center for Defense Information
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

In correcting the impression created by leading major newspapers that defense budgets have been inflated over recent years at the expense of domestic programs, Joshua Muravchik and Lawrence F. Kaplan refer to the Historical Tables published by the Office of Management and Budget and to other hard evidence which appears to reflect an entirely different development.

I have painfully learned to "respect" the ability of the press to invent canards but still retained a modicum of my earlier conviction that papers like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* would at least attempt to present the news that is really fit to print and, if necessary, admit earlier errors with an appropriate apology or explanation. For example, I had been quite certain that defense spending had been exempted from plans designed to eliminate the federal deficit by the year 2002, but Messrs. Muravchik and Kaplan state that this is not the case.

One can only wonder what steps the Department of Defense or the military have taken in recent years to set the record straight and to counteract (in particular vis-à-vis Congress) deceptive charges such as year-to-year comparisons that neglect, among other basic factors, double-digit inflation—or were they only waiting for COMMENTARY to take up another worthwhile cause?

EGON G. ROTHBLUM
Vienna, Austria

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK and LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN write:

Our article did not argue for any particular level of defense spending but only for an honest debate about this subject, which we said was impeded by misleading news accounts that obscured or denied the substantial defense cuts of the past decade. Although he is not a journalist, David Isenberg, in his letter, exemplifies all that we lamented. We did not argue that defense spending should have remained at cold-war levels, but no reputable party to this discussion, hawk or dove, disputes the plain fact that defense spending has declined by about 40 percent since the Reagan peak. The question of the day is whether this 40-percent cut is too much or too little. It is not, as Mr. Isenberg disingenuously says, whether defense spending should remain at Reagan-era levels.

Mr. Isenberg says that we "understate" defense spending by failing to include retirement pay, veterans' benefits, and some calculation of the military share of the national debt. This makes it sound as if we have chosen numbers to fit our argument. But, as we explained in a lengthy footnote, all our figures and our categories were taken directly from the official tables of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which, contrary to what Mr. Isenberg claims, do indeed include Department of Energy military programs and some other "defense-related activities" outside the Pentagon. These are the standard figures, not ones specially selected by us. Mr. Isenberg apparently has some innovative ideas about how to measure the defense budget. Perhaps they are good ones, but even doing the calculations his way would show that defense has been cut deeply during the past decade.

Again, it is not we but Mr. Isenberg who misleads about the distinction between discretionary and mandatory, or entitlement, spending. We took the four categories of domestic spending used by OMB—discretionary; means-tested entitlements (i.e., those for the poor); Social Security; and non-means-tested entitlements other than Social Security—and meticulously offered figures for each. We never mixed any of the categories. Hence Mr. Isenberg's claim that "the amount of the true increase in discretionary spending is significantly less than what [we] indicate" is simply mendacious, which is why he fails to offer any numbers.

Mr. Isenberg's method is evident yet again when he invokes proposed increases in weapons procurement as an example of military overspending. As we explained in the article, some parts of the defense budget, notably "readiness" accounts, were spared major cuts, while procurement was cut the most severely. This, as the Clinton administration clearly stated, was a deliberate budget strategy: a weapons' backlog from 1980's allowed for what Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution has called a "procurement holiday." Now, after several years, the administration says the holiday is over and procurement must begin to increase from its abnormally depressed level. Yet since the total defense budget will decline, not rise, other parts of the defense budget will have to be cut anew to pay for this increase.

Mr. Isenberg's comparison of U.S. spending with that of potential enemies is also misleading. For one thing, we do not really know what most of these closed societies spend. Moreover, their costs are different. But what does it matter that building defense capability costs the Chinese and Russians less than it costs us when the fact is that the Chinese have more soldiers than we do and the Russians have more weapons? The rationales for building the F-22 and the new submarine are also much stronger than Mr. Isenberg indicates, but it is not our purpose here to make that case. Our point is only that the debate should be conducted in a fair and rigorous way.

Which brings us to Egon G. Rothblum's letter, for which we thank him. One of the reasons some critics of the military indulge in the kind of illegitimate and wantonly false arguments we have described is that it is easy to get away with them. More than most other government agencies, the mili-

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tary is constrained from putting its side of the argument. This is as it must be: civilian supremacy requires that the military play only the most circumscribed role in policy debates. As a result, it falls to sympathetic civilians to put the record straight, or often it is not put straight at all.

The Meretz Factor

TO THE EDITOR:

"Reading the Israeli Electorate" by Rael Jean Isaac and Erich Isaac [October 1996] contains a singular pack of lies about the Meretz party, which I now represent in the Knesset. Not a single phrase about Meretz and about me when I was Minister of Education in the government of Yitzhak Rabin has any foundation in reality. I will try to refute these false allegations.

The Isaacs allege that Meretz is the ideological standard bearer of "post-Zionism." The latest manifesto of Meretz states:

> Meretz sees in Zionism the national movement of the Jewish people, which has succeeded, within 100 years, in settling in *Eretz Israel* a significant part of the Jewish people and in exercising their right to national self-determination in the state of Israel.
>
> The link between Israel and the Diaspora constitutes a vital part in ensuring the continuation of the Jewish people, and the dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora is essential to Jewish identity and culture. Israel will strengthen the solidarity of the Jewish people.

Meretz embodies the best tradition of historical Zionism but refuses to accept the right-wing's distorted interpretation of Zionism and its equation of Zionism with annexation. I have participated in public debates with members of the small group of intellectuals who define themselves as post-Zionists, taking, of course, the Zionist side.

Meretz does not, contrary to the allegation made by the Isaacs, advocate the complete separation of the state from Judaism. On the contrary, when I was Minister of Education I initiated—with the full support of my colleagues—two Basic Laws which define Israel as a *Jewish and democratic* state. Meretz objects to the religious coercion of Orthodox institutions and to the exclusion of non-Orthodox congregations from public and religious life. These ideas are also ones that are supported by the majority of American Jews.

The Isaacs allege that Meretz advocates "such staples of Western leftism" as "mandated representation of women on boards of unions and government corporations" (yes, we are guilty of such a crime); "a struggle against 'racism' in all its forms" (true again); and support for gay marriages (not true, though we are proud of our policy advocating equal rights for homosexuals). We admit to perpetrating such crimes, but in adopting these attitudes we are motivated not by "Western leftism" but by our Jewish and democratic beliefs that all men and women were created in God's image and are equal in the eyes of the law.

Shulamit Aloni, when she was Minister of Education, did indeed express some reservations about the way in which school trips to Auschwitz were operated, but the Isaacs forgot to mention that, when I succeeded her, I expanded such visits, and that I, as well as other Meretz leaders, have led delegations to Auschwitz.

The statement made about me, that through an adviser I proposed that an "archaic" emphasis on Jewish values and culture in the curriculum be replaced by "multiculturalism" is a perverted figment of the Isaacs' distorted imagination. Dur-

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ing my term the opposite took place: Jewish studies were invigorated and the number of students in the field increased dramatically.

Professor Moshe Zimmerman, a well-known historian, was appointed by the professional staff of the Ministry of Education. But when he made some preposterous remarks about the Bible and the Army, I publicly expressed my total disagreement with his views and refuted in strong words his totally unacceptable analogies. The same is true with regard to the proposal made by Micha Goldman, then Deputy Minister (alas, not a Meretz but a Labor man), to change the text of *Hatikvah*. I spoke in the Knesset and dismissed the idea.

What remains of the Isaacs' diatribe? Nothing but proof of the fact that they abuse their academic credentials and demonstrate their loathing for facts and truth if these do not serve their dubious cause.

AMNON RUBINSTEIN
Member of Knesset
Jerusalem, Israel

RAEL JEAN ISAAC and ERICH ISAAC write:

Amnon Rubinstein insists that Meretz embodies "the best tradition of historical Zionism" and cites its manifesto as proof. That is like saying that because affirmative-action policies claim to implement the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, such policies do not in fact discriminate among individuals on the basis of race. Mr. Rubinstein's absurd claim that Meretz occupies mainstream Zionist status is undercut even by some of his own followers, who staged an unsuccessful mini-revolt on just those grounds.

Meretz was created prior to the 1992 elections as a coalition of three odd bedfellows: the far-Left socialist party Mapam; the militantly secularist, post-Zionist Citizens Rights party of Shulamit Aloni; and Shinui, founded in the mid-70's as a nonideological, good-government party and now led by Mr. Rubinstein. In May 1995, disillusioned activists from virtually every party branch urged Mr. Rubinstein to pull Shinui out of Meretz on the grounds that he had failed utterly in his promised mission of "moderating" the other components of the party. Meretz, the activists wrote, represented the extreme Left, and Shinui's involvement was "causing serious damage to Shinui and irreparable damage to the security of Israel." Mr. Rubinstein's reaction, according to *Maariv* (May 19, 1995), was, "for reasons which he kept to himself, not to respond."

And here is a more telling comment on Meretz: in the last election, it alone among the formally Zionist parties won a higher proportion of the Arab than of the Jewish vote.

Mr. Rubinstein asserts that Meretz does not advocate separation of religion and state but is merely opposed to "religious coercion." In fact, Meretz specializes in attacks on religious sensibilities. Shulamit Aloni, long the party's leader (she withdrew before the 1996 elections), sought to remove the words "May the Lord remember" from the official prayer for fallen soldiers; referred to Joseph's tomb as the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf; and, denigrating the attachment of Jews to the tomb of Rachel, spoke in the same breath of the biblical matriarch Rachel and the biblical prostitute Rahav.

As for the position Meretz takes on separation of religion and state, the party promises to strive for "separation of religion from politics and politics from religion." If Mr. Rubinstein believes this is different from separation of religion and state, there are spokesmen for the party who are not aware of it. Aaron Liebman, coordinator of the American Friends of Meretz, wrote to the *New York Times* (July 15, 1996) objecting to a news article referring to Meretz as "*militantly*" secular (emphasis added) but allowed that to the extent "the party's platform advocates separation of religion and state, Meretz may indeed be described as secular."

In the wake of the Rabin assassination, according to a report in the *Jerusalem Post* (November 15, 1995), Mr. Rubinstein, as Minister of Education, called on students, parents, and teachers "not to be afraid" to report on teachers who express "extreme right-wing views." (Shades of Pavlik Morozov, the Soviet child eulogized for denouncing his own father to the authorities.) He also vowed to "filter" rabbis and to cut off funding for religious schools that failed to sign a Ministry of Education-devised loyalty oath. In an interview on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* (November 10, 1995), Mr. Rubinstein accused "a whole section of the Israeli population" of "using the Torah, Jewish law, invoking God Almighty in order to justify their foul deeds."

Are these examples of the tolerance, humane values, and simple good manners Mr. Rubinstein has said he is devoted to disseminating among Israeli youth?

Mr. Rubinstein claims Meretz's support for the politically-correct fashions of the American Left is not imitative, but derives directly from the party's Jewish and democratic beliefs. Are we expected to believe the idea of mandating the presence of "community representatives" on corporate boards came to Meretz from the party's study of Torah? (In fact, the idea was first cooked up in the 1970's in the fertile brain of Ralph Nader.) As far as gay marriages are concerned, according to the Fall 1995 *Meretz Report*, the party's achievements include proposing "a law that would recognize the rights of homosexual couples." Not yet gay marriage, perhaps, but a crucial station along the way to that end.

Mr. Rubinstein slides gently over Shulamit Aloni's attacks on school trips to Auschwitz when she was Minister of Education, noting that she expressed "some reservations" about the way they were "operated." To be blunt, she objected to such trips on the grounds that they made the students "nationalistic." Her effort to halt the program aroused a furor in Israel. But in the present context the real significance of this incident, and countless others in which Shulamit Aloni showed her unfitness for office, is that the party insisted she be kept as Minister of Education and repeatedly threatened to bring down the government whenever Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sought to transfer her to another post. (Rabin finally succeeded in moving her to Communications.)

We need not dwell on

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Mr. Rubinstein's claim that, far from emphasizing multiculturalism, he reinvigorated Jewish studies in his own term of office. This assertion has been refuted at length in COMMENTARY by Yoram Hazony (Letters to the Editor, October 1996). As Hazony reports, under Mr. Rubinstein the Ministry of Education set out to replace the text of the state's Education Law (once described by David Ben-Gurion as one of two pieces of legislation embodying the central aims of Israel) with a new set of "purposes" heavily weighted with "universalist" as opposed to Jewish or Zionist values.

In May 1996, Mr. Rubinstein's Ministry of Education also instructed government-sponsored youth-movement leaders to drop "Zionism" and "identification with the Jewish people and the Zionist movement" from the ideals enjoying official support. And Mr. Rubinstein strongly backed a Tel Aviv high-school principal who announced plans to modify the school's curriculum for Holocaust Memorial Day so as to "do away with the exclusivity of the Jewish Holocaust," presenting it instead as "a link in the chain of mass destruction of many nations and populations throughout history."

We note that Mr. Rubinstein does not try to defend Professor Moshe Zimmerman. But Zimmerman's views were well known when he was appointed by the Education Ministry, nor was he fired after he made what Mr. Rubinstein charitably calls "preposterous remarks about the Bible and the Army." Evidently, Mr. Rubinstein's zeal to root out teachers with "extremist" views did not extend to officials with extreme anti-Zionist views.

Mr. Rubinstein's letter reveals contempt for the most elementary rules of civil discourse (we are not mistaken, or misled, but liars who demonstrate a "loathing for facts and truth") and an arrogant conviction that he can bury the facts under abusive rhetoric.

It was this very arrogance, this contempt for those with a different viewpoint, that played such a large role in Labor's defeat. As we noted in our article, to many Israelis, Meretz represented a threatening negation of traditional Zionism. Perceiving the Labor party to be under Meretz's ideological influence and incapable of cutting the cord that bound them together, Israelis voted for what they hoped would be a Zionist alternative.

Solzhenitsyn

TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations to Joseph Epstein and COMMENTARY for "Why Solzhenitsyn Will Not Go Away" [November 1996]. This is among the fullest and fairest treatments of Solzhenitsyn to appear in many a year and is characterized by an intellectual generosity almost wholly lacking in the typical approaches to the subject. In this age of smug and self-assured postmodernism, when ironic disdain is the mark of superior souls, Mr. Epstein dares to take seriously Solzhenitsyn's "mission" to his people and to the truth. Mr. Epstein also has the good sense to put Solzhenitsyn's sometimes cranky, often illuminating polemical statements in their proper, secondary or subordinate, place. He also admirably avoids succumbing to the various legends about Solzhenitsyn's supposedly illiberal and anti-democratic political views.

Mr. Epstein is right to emphasize the very Russian character of Solzhenitsyn: undoubtedly he is the stuff of which a Conrad novel is made. But Solzhenitsyn's *thought* is not simply and narrowly Russian, and his debts to the West, in the

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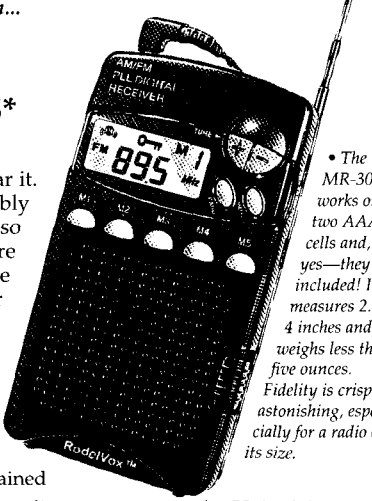

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most capacious sense of that term, are too often overlooked or understated. Solzhenitsyn's works, like *The First Circle* and *The Gulag Archipelago*, brim with references to Dante, Homer, and Shakespeare. His 1991 essay, *Rebuilding Russia*, reveals a more than fleeting familiarity with the political reflection of Aristotle, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Spengler, among others.

I also believe that the "Slavophile" character of Solzhenitsyn's thought, alluded to by Mr. Epstein, is much exaggerated. Believe it or not, Solzhenitsyn is a kind of liberal (albeit of a most conservative variety) who defends the indispensability of political liberty and the rule of law for a decent and free political order. Against modern progressives, he repeatedly emphasizes that freedom cannot survive without sturdy moral foundations (and the plight of contemporary Russia more than confirms his insight, as Mr. Epstein himself suggests). But Solzhenitsyn does not believe *à la* the Slavophiles or Tolstoy that a moral "community" can endure without adequate constitutional or legal arrangements. In the third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*, responding to Tolstoy's claim that only moral self-improvement matters, Solzhenitsyn writes:

> Of course, no one is in need of freedom if he already has it. We can agree with him that political freedom is not what matters in the end. The goal of human evolution is not freedom for the sake of freedom. Nor is it the building of an ideal polity. What matters, of course, are the moral foundations of society. But that is in the long run: what about the beginning? What about the first step? Yasnaya Polyana [Tolstoy's estate] in those days was an open club for thinkers. But if it had been blockaded as [the poet Anna] Akhmatova's apartment was when every visitor was asked for his passport, if Tolstoy had been pressed as hard as we all were in Stalin's time, when three men feared to come together under one roof, even he would have demanded political freedom.

Modern intellectuals . . . hate Solzhenitsyn precisely because of his greatness; the profundity of his "mission" powerfully reveals the empty posturing of their own. In Russia, the demi-educated intellectual class . . . all too readily found ways to live with and even provide support for Communism. They now freely ridicule Solzhenitsyn's message of "repentance and self-limitation." This message hits too close to home and would demand real introspection and the assumption of responsibilities they are too weak or spiritually confused to bear.

Yet Mr. Epstein is right; Solzhenitsyn "will not go away." His books and witness are too substantial and reflect truths about our world and the human condition which can be ignored only at our peril. I take some solace in remembering that the works of the greatest analyst of modern democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, remained largely forgotten in France between 1900 and 1960, in a period of first positivist and then Marxist intellectual ascendancy. Then, beginning with Raymond Aron, the French rediscovered Tocqueville and his remarkable contemporaneity.

Solzhenitsyn's work will endure as long as the essential distinction between truth and falsehood endures. And all the progressive and postmodernist posturing in the world cannot erase that primordial and fundamental distinction.

DANIEL J. MAHONEY
Worcester, Massachusetts

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Jewish Liberalism

TO THE EDITOR:

I was surprised to encounter in "Jewish Liberalism Revisited" by Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen [November 1996] the statement that "in most traditional sources, Jews are commanded to assist the Jewish poor, but not necessarily the non-Jewish poor."

It must have escaped the authors that the Babylonian Talmud (Gitin 61a) mandates that Jews support the non-Jewish poor. While there are some opinions that this ordinance reflects self-interest and is designed to forestall anti-Jewish conduct, I have shown in my *Ethics of Responsibility* that according to Maimonides (certainly an eminent legal authority) the concern for the non-Jewish poor arises from the religio-ethical imperative to imitate divine moral attributes.

WALTER S. WURZBURGER
Yeshiva University
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Jewish Liberalism Revisited," Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen offer

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what seems to me a seriously one-sided characterization of the Jewish religion. I was particularly struck by their statement:

> Jewish religious values, as expressed in the Bible, the Talmud, and later rabbinic literature, are ethnocentric rather than universalistic. In most traditional sources, Jews are commanded to assist the Jewish poor but not necessarily the non-Jewish poor; to return the lost objects of their fellow Jews but not the lost objects of non-Jews; and so forth.

The implication is clear: the scope of Jewish moral concern is limited to the Jewish people.

The truth, of course, is that Judaism contains within it both ethnocentric and universalistic elements, which are combined in ways that are endlessly paradoxical, and fruitful. Else, what is the divine mission on earth for which the Jewish people have been chosen by God—a God Who is just, and Who created every human being in His image?

Indeed, if we accept Messrs. Liebman and Cohen's contention that Judaism is only an ethnocentric religion, how can we Jews defend ourselves against the charges of anti-Semites like Voltaire, who characterized Judaism as a fossilized tribal religion of no worth to the rest of mankind?

LUKE LEA
Signal Mountain, Tennessee

TO THE EDITOR:

With a mixture of faulty statistics and bald assertions, Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen have "proved" that American Jews are not markedly liberal, and/or that their liberalism is not related to their Judaism. First, they demonstrate, at length, that Orthodox Jews are not liberal, as if that were not a given. Then they find that, statistically, Jews are not much more liberal than their non-Jewish demographic equivalents—without excluding the Orthodox. Along the way, they denigrate the wisdom, understanding, and/or motivation of those Jewish liberals who stubbornly remain standing. Finally, they assert that whatever of Jewish liberalism cannot be gainsaid does not have its source in Jewish values—without attempting to identify any other source.

Thus, the compassionate, humanitarian aspects of Judaism are summarily dismissed—to what purpose?

IRVIN PRUZAN
Seattle, Washington

TO THE EDITOR:

Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen state that frequent synagogue attendees register views in the National Opinion Research Center survey that are consistently *less* liberal on almost every issue than those who attend synagogue infrequently or not at all, or who are intermarried.

I do not consider that finding at all surprising. Because of their exposure to discrimination and persecution these past 2,000 years, Jews have developed a greater sensitivity to the principles of social justice. As a result of their greater commitment to the survival of Judaism and of the Jewish people, religiously observant Jews feel a greater allegiance to their own people. On the other hand, less observant Jews are less concerned with the welfare of

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their own, yet are still dedicated to correcting social injustice.

In this imperfect world, I feel it necessary to give priority to my Jewish brothers and sisters.

ELLIOT N. SCHUBERT
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR:

"Jewish Liberalism Revisited" by Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen reopens perplexing issues involving Jews, religion, and politics. At the outset it is important to note the stark contradiction between classical English and European usage of the term "liberal" and modern usage in the United States. As has been pointed out repeatedly by commentators from Joseph Schumpeter to Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, liberalism originally meant limited government and a private-enterprise system featuring free, open, competitive markets—in other words, capitalism or individualism with an emphasis on freedom. . . . In modern usage in the United States, by contrast, liberalism has come to mean large activist government with overall government control to achieve welfare and equality—in other words, collectivism or socialism. . . .

Measured by these latter definitions, modern Jews in the United States are clearly liberals. Some 70 to 75 percent of Jewish voters support the Democratic party, with its collectivist wing of McGovern, Dukakis, Gephardt, the Black Caucus, Edward Kennedy, *et al.* This percentage is exceeded only by the 90 to 95 percent of blacks who vote Democratic (some of whose leaders have also recently been exhibiting gross anti-Semitism). . . .

The voting pattern of American Jews is all the more astonishing in view of the fact that their ancestors fled to the Statue of Liberty from Central and Eastern Europe, feeling the hot breath of the tyrant-prince on their necks, in an effort to prosper under a free-market economy open to them virtually *in toto*. . . . And prosper they did, to an unparalleled extent. Yet, as Milton Himmelfarb once put it in a remark now widely quoted, although Jews in America have come to live like affluent Episcopalians, they nevertheless continue to vote like Puerto Ricans. Milton Friedman has stated even more provocatively that no group in history may have benefited more than the Jews from capitalism, and yet Jews are heavily represented in the ranks of capitalism's intellectual and ideological opponents.

This much of the story is well-documented. What is new, however, is the growing insistence by some Jewish advocates of collectivism that their views are compelled by the moral imperatives of the Jewish religion. To take one example: a local community organization, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, recently informed me in a letter that opposition to welfare reform is a moral imperative of the Jewish faith, and so are increases in the minimum wage.

MAURICE ROSENFIELD
Chicago, Illinois

CHARLES S. LIEBMAN and STEVEN M. COHEN write:

The argument we advanced in our article may have been misunderstood by some readers. We addressed what we have come to regard as a faulty, two-part assertion: (a) that American Jews disproportionately support a liberal political agenda whose tenets include government assistance to the disadvantaged, special assistance to African-Americans, and a zealous pursuit of civil liberties and civil rights; and (b) that they do so because of their fidelity to traditional Jewish values.

When compared with other Americans of similar educational background and residence patterns, Jews, we found, are in fact not more liberal on the key issues mentioned above; nor does the fact that they vote disproportionately for the Democratic party prove that they harbor especially liberal views. When it comes to those Jews who *are* more liberal—i.e., more liberal than their fellow Jews, or more liberal than one might predict from their economic and residential patterns—most tend to be less committed *as Jews*, and also to be indifferent to the Jewish tradition in other matters. Their views, for example, on sexually-oriented issues like abortion, homosexuality, and pornography run contrary to the tradition.

We also said in our article that the weight of the tradition remains predominantly ethnocentric or particularist, not universalist in the spirit of contemporary liberalism. In most cases, traditional texts and the major rabbinical commentators distinguish between Jews' obligations to other Jews and Jews' obligations to non-Jews.

That there are contrary voices within the tradition is, of course, something we are well aware of, and we sympathize with efforts by Rabbi Wurzburger and others to expand the more universalist strain and to reinterpret the tradition accordingly. (At the risk of neglecting important scholars, we also point to the work of Moshe Greenberg, Emanuel Rackman, retired Israeli Supreme Court Justice Menachem Elon, and scholars working through the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.) We have no doubt that the tradition does lend itself to a less ethnocentric interpretation than has been the case in recent years and especially in Israel. But none of this changes the facts regarding the decidedly non-liberal nature of the Jewish tradition.

Jewish liberals will want to argue that American Jews are insufficiently committed to liberal causes. One of us is, in general, sympathetic with the effort to move Jews in a more liberal direction; one of us is, in general, unsympathetic. But we both caution that those who choose to argue a coincidence between Judaism and liberalism need to treat the textual tradition with much greater care than many now do.

Music, and Movie Music

TO THE EDITOR:

I thoroughly enjoyed Terry Teachout's defense of middlebrow culture as a path to higher cultural levels ["Battle of the Brows," October 1996]. In the 40's and 50's, New York City public schools offered classes in "music appreciation," a scholastic version of the Boston Pops concerts. But having attended such classes, I can attest to the fact that this decidedly middlebrow introduction was of-

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ten the students' first taste of symphonic music, which led to buying records, attending concerts, and competing with one another in identifying compositions. Many of my contemporaries can trace their interest in and love of classical music to those classes.

Unfortunately, "music appreciation" is no longer taught in public schools. However, it is not only the radicals' assault on all Western culture that has thinned concert audiences. Classical conductors and performers have mostly ignored young audiences. Many years ago I was involved in an effort to engage a chamber-music orchestra in a series of performances and lectures for public-school students. Although we had funding and publicity for the effort, directors and performers turned us down. They were contemptuous of "kid" audiences for "serious" music. Those "kids" now spend "serious" money on records and performances by their rock idols, and, possibly, by the Three Tenors, while chamber-music audiences dwindle.

RUTH S. KING
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

It was a distinct pleasure for this lifelong film-music fan and former reviewer of film music for *High Fidelity* magazine to read Terry Teachout's comprehensive and astute survey of the field ["I Heard It at the Movies," November 1966].

Mr. Teachout mentions all the important Hollywood film composers except one—the German-trained Franz Waxman (1906-67)—who was unaccountably overlooked. But, as is borne out by the four volumes of symphonic excerpts available on the Varese Sarabande label, brilliantly interpreted by the Queensland Symphony under Richard Mills, Waxman's was the one of the most versatile and sophisticated musical imaginations in Hollywood. Stylistically he bridged the more Romantic approach of the Erich Korngold-Max Steiner-Alfred Newman tradition with the edgier, more astringent sound of the younger generation of David Raksin, Hugo Friedhofer, and Alex North. His superb scores for such varied films as *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Rebecca*, *The Silver Chalice*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *An American Tragedy*, *Rear Window*, *Peyton Place*, *The Nun's Story*, *Crime in the Streets*, *Taras Bulba*, and *The Spirit of St. Louis*, among many others, remain among the landmarks of the bygone era of classic film music.

In addition, I believe Virgil Thomson's unique scores for documentarians Pare Lorentz (*The River* and *The Plow That Broke the Plains*) and Robert Flaherty (*Louisiana Story*) should have been listed alongside those of Aaron Copland.

Finally, the English composer Arthur Bliss wrote a number of first-class scores, such as that for *Things to Come*.

PAUL A. SNOOK
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout's brief but engaging observations on music for the film set me to thinking about someone who is conspicuously absent in his thorough rundown: Boris "Lalo" Schifrin. In the midst of a world of "musical illiterates," . . . Schifrin stands out: classically trained, a musician of high accomplishment, and a composer

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capable of creating non-programmatic music that can stand on its own apart from film contexts. . . .

In his use of Latin, jazz, and Stravinsky-inspired themes, Schifrin captured the sense of movement in the action films of the post-war 1960's better than the more classically influenced composers did. Thus, and not entirely accidentally, his Latin roots—he grew up in Buenos Aires, considering film rather than opera the central idiom of the age—better served a native American art form than did older traditions of an earlier movie period, with their florid imitation-Mahler, in the case of major films, and warmed-over Rossini in Westerns. The sound-track music he wrote for *Bullitt* (featuring Steve McQueen) and *Cool Hand Luke* (starring Paul Newman) are classics in their own right—capturing an urban California sensibility in the former and a rural Arkansas folk world in the latter. . . .

In addition, Schifrin showed that he could, if he put his mind to it, equal, if not outdo, the Mahleresque sound of the figures Mr. Teachout covers in the piece, as in his music for *Voyage of the Damned*, which also allowed him to express the anti-fascism he had felt when he was growing up in Perón's Argentina. . . .

Schifrin himself, however, has viewed his own achievements as a Hollywood studio musician with condescension, while sadly mimicking the sterile experimentalism that has now faded into the background. And he has paid an inordinate price for aping the formalisms of our "serious" music, when he should be reaping the benefits of having spurned such formalisms when artistic push came to shove.

As an old friend . . . , I have always felt a particular anger, inspired no doubt by deeply partisan sentiments, that the efforts of this extraordinary figure, whose work in Hollywood equaled and exceeded even the best of his generation like Quincy Jones, seem to have fallen between critical stools.

If music for film is finally to achieve some deserved recognition, Schifrin's work needs to be reappraised and recognized. . . .

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Many thanks to Ruth S. King. I, too, grew up with "music appreciation" (in a small-town Midwestern public school in the 60's), without which I would have discovered classical music much later, if at all. I shudder to think what today's children are being taught about classical music—if anything.

I was no less pleased to hear from Paul A. Snook (whose *High Fidelity* reviews I remember well) and Irving Louis Horowitz. I will be discussing Virgil Thomson in a future issue of COMMENTARY. As for the other composers mentioned, suffice it to say that articles like my "I Heard It at the Movies" should always be assumed to carry a "space permitting" caveat.

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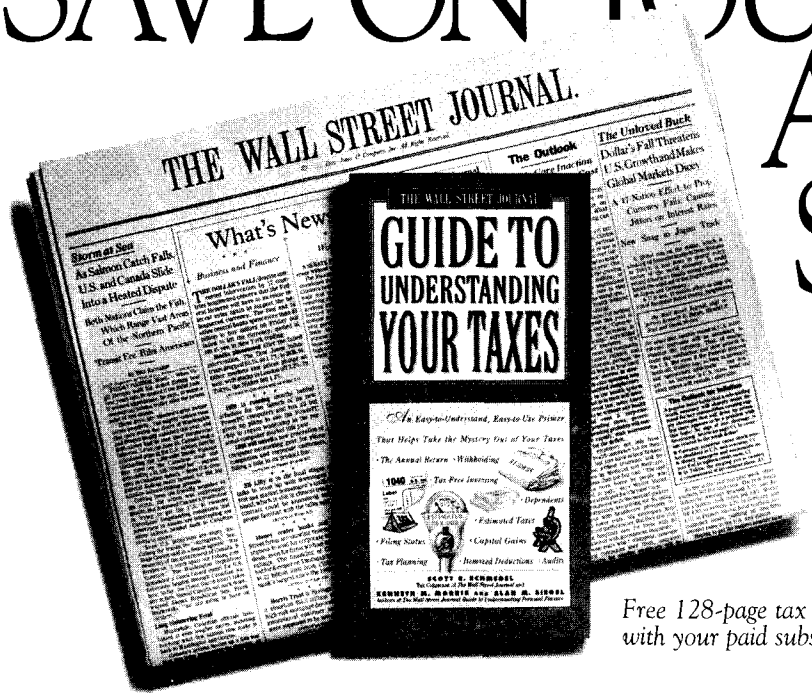

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Commentary
February 1997

On the Future of Conservatism

A Symposium

THE NOVEMBER 1996 election and a number of other recent events have offered an opportunity for reassessment among conservatives. At issue is not only the meaning of the election results themselves but the present and future character of a movement which only two years ago seemed to some to be bringing about a "revolution" in American political life.

Writing in COMMENTARY *last March, Irwin M. Stelzer pointed to a possibly fatal divergence between "economic" conservatives, for whom the primary considerations were the growth of government and the degree of its intrusiveness into the business of the country, and "social" conservatives "intensely concerned with their vision of a re-moralized America" and not necessarily indisposed to the use of government to promote it. Since that time, not only has the rift Stelzer pointed to evidently gone unbridged, but the "social," or "values," conservatives have themselves shown signs of splitting apart.*

Thus, in a symposium entitled "The End of Democracy?" (November 1996), the editors of the religious journal First Things, *citing the "judicial usurpation of politics," put into question the very "legitimacy" of the American democratic system and invited a number of writers to consider the steps, not excluding force, which a citizen might be morally entitled to take against "the existing regime." The symposium, with its explicit invocation of the analogy of Nazi Germany, and its echoes of 1960's-style radicalism, prompted the outraged resignation of a number of prominent conservatives from the magazine's board. Articles on this episode followed in newspapers and weekly periodicals; the January issue of* First Things *carried a response to the original symposium and a further statement by the editors.*

Other signs of disarray include the apparent division between most conservatives and the leadership of the Republican party over the California Civil Rights Initiative outlawing racial preferences, as well as ongoing and perhaps irreconcilable differences within conservative ranks on issues ranging from foreign policy to immigration to relations between church and state.

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We asked a number of distinguished intellectuals to weigh these matters and respond to the following questions:

1. What is the significance of the November election's mixed results, and what do they reveal about the current standing of conservatism in American political life? Does it still make sense to speak of a conservative "revolution"?

2. How deeply are you troubled by the splits within conservatism? Are some more consequential than others? In particular, what to your mind are the longer-term implications of the radicalizing mood revealed in the *First Things* symposium?

3. What is your own view of conservatism's mandate in the period ahead?

The responses, fifteen in all, are printed below in alphabetical order.

Robert L. Bartley

For nearly two decades now a conservative tide has been running through our life and times. I see no reason to believe that either one equivocal election or a bit of clerical hyperbole represents a basic change of direction. While not every wave washes beyond the last, we are still at flood rather than ebb.

History is likely to regard 1996 as the year Republicans confirmed their control of the Congress, despite the mistakes of their short tenure and the frantic efforts of their political and cultural opponents. If the historical pattern of second-term presidencies repeats itself, the Republicans will add to their majority in the next election, and they are learning how to wield the enormous power of the institution they won in 1994. While they are a bit chastened by the attack they had to withstand, the weight of their caucus is not less conservative but more so.

President Clinton won reelection not by opposing conservative themes but by "triangulating" them. It is not easy to defeat an incumbent President with a reasonable economy and no foreign-policy trauma. The economic expansion was a gift from the Republican Congress; the bond market bottomed out precisely on the day the GOP took the Congress in 1994. And the Reagan-Bush victories in foreign policy left ample room for both their own mistakes and those of their successor. Meanwhile, Clinton ran this past November as the most conservative Democratic presidential nominee since Grover Cleveland.

The electorate, finally, gave the President a presumption of innocence in the sprawling scandals of his administration. The standard of "guilt beyond a reasonable doubt" typically applies in criminal trials, when the stake is sending someone to prison. It may strike some of us as strange to apply it when the stake is whether to give someone the nation's highest office. Yet the recent history of scandal and the recent headiness of fads do carry dangers, and there is something to be said for the electorate's view. Indeed, it could be called a conservative view. Yet President Clinton seems certain to be crippled by ongoing scandal, and, reelected with no mandate, he is no more likely than King Canute to stop the tide.

The most powerful exception concerns the judiciary. While newly solid Republican majorities in the Senate will block strongly ideological liberal appointees, the President still holds the initiative in naming judges. And even Republican jurists, we have seen, are susceptible to the liberal drift in the bar and law schools. The schism between judges and the people is likely to grow over

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the next four years. It is totally unsurprising and entirely appropriate for conservatives to worry the issue of judges abusing their powers in order to substitute their personal views for those of elected representatives and even voters' decisions in referendums.

There is, indeed, no issue on which conservatives are more solidly united. Nothing could be more fanciful than the notion that the issue of judicial usurpation was discovered in the recent *First Things* symposium; conservative consensus on this issue has been complete since at least the time we started to learn what Justice David Souter really thinks. With great talent for agitating an issue, Father Richard John Neuhaus wrapped the underlying consensus in inflammatory rhetoric. It is conceivable that when the dust settles, his stridency may even have done some good, in both heightening the issue and showing that conservatives do draw limits. If memory serves, in the 1960's liberals did not resign from publication boards over "Off the Pigs" or front-page recipes for Molotov cocktails.

But where is the great split in conservative ranks? It seems to be Neuhaus against everyone else. Even Robert Bork, the most important contributor to the *First Things* symposium, has written a letter to the editors (in the January issue of that magazine) suing for divorce. Despite liberal propaganda to the contrary, the leaders who have mobilized the Christian Right by no means buy into the Neuhausian rhetoric; to the contrary, they saw the symposium as an invitation for Christians to drop out of politics in favor of the next world.

As the conservative cause prospers, its proliferating publications inevitably have to practice what the business world calls brand differentiation. *National Review* stakes its ground on outlawing immigration and legalizing drugs. The *Weekly Standard* becomes the inside-the-Beltway bible. The *American Spectator* presses Whitewater harder than even I would. My own taste runs to the weekly edition of the *Washington Times*, a newspaper where you find the news the mainstream media missed or buried. If *First Things* finds its thing with the illegitimacy of the "regime," so what? May they all in their own ways prosper.

THE SPLIT that does concern me is between the conservative mainstream and the libertarians, who have been a splinter but are riding a great wave of demographics. Among both Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and Internet youths, a rather doctrinaire libertarianism already prevails. Precisely because these groups are in most ways so admirable, their influence is bound to grow. They will be a wholesome force toward smaller and more open government, lower taxes, faster economic growth, school vouchers, term limits, and a good many things I and most conservatives wholeheartedly endorse.

Yet it is also true that the most worrisome problems of society today revolve around the erosion of social controls that have traditionally enforced morality: I mean the weakening of families, the still-high rates of crime, the scourge of drugs, the coarseness of civil discourse. We seem to live in a society where drugs rule the slums while middle-class kids from the New Jersey suburbs fail to understand you do not throw a newborn out with the garbage.

A high-achieving Silicon Valley libertarian may in fact be able to keep his life integrated and deal responsibly with others while, say, supporting serial wives and live-in girlfriends, occasionally snorting coke, and voting a single-issue pro-choice ticket. But I very much doubt that any large society can be run without some level of social control, some means, one hopes, short of but including the force of law, to reinforce the better side of human nature.

In our times the effort of communities and neighborhoods to hold some control has been under systematic assault by a libertarianism of the Left, embodied in what the American Civil Liberties Union has become, and acting through the imperial judiciary. Court decisions have restricted the power of school principals as too arbitrary, and destroyed the possibility of exiling disruptive students to disciplinary schools. Against the sentiments of the population, school prayer and even a moment of silence have been made anathema. In pursuit of "civil rights," we now have a juvenile-justice system that teaches, until its clients have reached an incorrigible age, that there are no serious sanctions. Mainstream conservatives want to reverse this trend, changing the law to redress what the judiciary has done.

As free-market libertarians grow in influence, I hope they give some serious thought to finding a way to help. Mainstream conservatives, meanwhile, should not fall back on symbolic and ultimately silly palliatives. Understandably, libertarians see the V-chip on the Right as very much like gun control on the Left—both annoy their victims without having any practical effect.

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Yet there is a larger and more compelling case to be made. We are at a point in history, indeed, where the moral dimension is appearing from many directions. Even free-market economists, for example, are concluding from studies of third-world and post-Communist development that the most important factor is the rule of law, with its underlying moral foundation. As science works its way through more and more arcane causality, answers to the ultimate riddle recede farther and farther. Science is ever useful, but its religious pretenses fade before questions like, what came before the Big Bang? We may not be undergoing a full-scale Great Awakening, but we are experiencing an era of moral concern that reaches far beyond the fundamentalist Right.

The great frontier for the conservative tide is of course the culture. The media, the creative arts, and the universities are still dominated by the adversary culture *cum* establishment. Perhaps there is no answer except a flanking attack, as mainly conservative think tanks have supplanted the universities as centers of public policy, and right-wing radio hosts raised an audience in the midst of declining newspaper readership and network news ratings. But against liberal opponents who lacked the courage to stand against the radical Left in the 1960's, I would not rule out a more frontal attack; I suspect that the route to their heart runs through the pocketbook. We should also recognize, of course, that in all of these institutions there are some people sensitive to the merits of an argument.

The big temptation to conservatives, and especially conservative intellectuals, is self-realizing pessimism. As many rising movements have discovered, it is easier to tear down than build. Conservatism in particular, in its view of human nature and in its recent historical experience, has a strong pessimistic strain. Sometimes conservatives seem unhappy unless they are losing. They need to guard against seizing on a few receding waves as evidence that the tide has turned against them.

Robert L. Bartley *is the editor of the* Wall Street Journal *and the author of* The Seven Fat Years: And How to Do It Again.

Peter L. Berger

The 1996 election did not reverse the conservative revolution of the 1994 election for the simple reason that there was no such revolution in the first place. I claim no great expertise in American politics, but it seems to me that both elections were primarily determined by fear. In 1994 many voters were scared that Hillary Clinton would push them, sooner or later, into some sort of Bolshevik health-care system; in 1996, they feared that Newt Gingrich would take away the health-care system they had. And, of course, there were other criss-crossing anxieties, none of which Bob Dole managed to allay.

Be that as it may, conservatives, of all people, should cringe at the word "revolution," no matter what adjective precedes it; and a "conservative revolution" is an oxymoron indeed. Rather, what can be observed over several elections and from other measures of American political life is a shift to the Right on a number of issues, notably on economic and welfare policies. This shift provides a chance for conservative politics. It is a sad commentary on the leadership of the Republican party that this chance has been consistently missed, at least since the end of the Reagan administration.

As for the alliance between "economic" and "social" or "values" conservatives, there were obvious tensions at work even in the heyday of that alliance, caused not least by class differences. On one side there were people who thought that being born-again was some sort of Hindu superstition, while people on the other side thought that Groton was a throat disease. As many observers have noted, the end of the cold war put further strain on the alliance. Nevertheless, given the continuing challenges from the Left, the alliance is still plausible.

The question is whether the "values" issues can be defined in such a way as to permit conservatives to expand into the middle ground of American politics. It seems to me that the answer to this will determine the future of conservatism.

The "radicalizing mood" referred to in the editors' statement is understandable in view of various disappointments, among which must certainly be included the role of the federal courts. If one is located in academia, as I am, the continuing domination of elite culture and some of its not-so-elite dependencies by various demented

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ideologies still sprouting from the decaying carcass of the late 60's is enough to make one think of moving to another country (an impulse quickly enough checked as one goes over the list of possible destinations). But any radicalizing mood should be held at bay, especially by those who think of themselves as conservatives. Otherwise, the real opportunities for conservative politics will be lost for a long time, and conservatism will be relegated to a sectarian subculture.

Since there is no credible vehicle for conservative politics in America other than the Republican party, the failure of its leadership to articulate "values" positions that will appeal to larger numbers of voters is deplorable. (They have done much better, of course, on economic and welfare policies, with the bizarre result that President Clinton ran in 1996 by employing a rhetoric that, on those issues, could be well described as moderate Republican.) The reasons for this failure are not very mysterious. Most leading Republicans are economic conservatives, equally ill at ease with the Left-leaning culture (with which they are often afflicted in their own homes by their wives and children) and with their discomfiting allies on the "values" Right. As a result, they alternate between an avoidance of positions that might give ammunition to the Left and a patently awkward endorsement of positions of the "values" Right.

A particularly shameful example of appeasement of the Left was the failure of the Dole campaign to support the California Civil Rights Initiative, a failure that was as distasteful morally as it was politically dumb.* On the other hand, the mouthing of evangelical religious sentiments and of vociferous anti-abortion rhetoric by upper-middle-class Republican politicians to whom both the sentiments and the rhetoric are clearly alien is unlikely to convince the groups thus being wooed. It takes the rare political skills of a Bill Clinton to be successfully insincere.

IT IS in this context that the episode involving *First Things*, referred to in the editors' statement, is more than a tempest in a teacup. I was one of those who resigned from the magazine's board over this matter and I address it here with reluctance, because I have great respect and affection for Father Richard John Neuhaus, whose sincerity is unquestionable and whose contributions to the conservative cause have been very great. But the questioning of the legitimacy of the American political system in the *First Things* symposium is a prime case of the counterproductive radicalizing mood mentioned earlier. If one decides that the system has become illegitimate, where does one go from there? Does one hole up with guns in the foothills of the Rockies? Engage in civil disobedience? Move abroad? Elect what Europeans call "inner emigration"?

Any of these options involves a withdrawal from meaningful politics. To consider such an option in the United States today strikes me as profoundly implausible as well as strangely parochial. If the American polity is illegitimate, where is legitimacy to be found? The allusions to Nazi Germany in this exercise are particularly offensive: are we back now to the "Amerika" language of the 60's, this time in a Right translation?

A key concern of *First Things* is a usurpation of power by the courts, described most forcefully (and, to me, persuasively) by Robert Bork's contribution to that magazine's November symposium. But is this enough reason to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the system? The American separation of powers has always been a creaky affair. Time and again, the other two branches of government have usurped power in constitutionally dubious ways. Congress has tried to run foreign policy. Agencies of the executive branch have legislated by way of regulations.

It seems to me, however, that for most of the *First Things* contributors, and for the magazine's editors, the driving concern has been not so much the power the courts have improperly assumed but rather what they have done with this power. And at the center of this concern is the issue of abortion.

A simple thought-experiment will serve to illuminate the problem here. Imagine that abortion in the United States had achieved its present legal status through an act of Congress rather than a Supreme Court decision. Imagine further that the Supreme Court had then ruled this act to be unconstitutional. I doubt very much that most of the *First Things* contributors would have viewed the latter action as a serious usurpation of power, let alone a reason to question the legitimacy of the American polity.

IN THE same November issue of *First Things* a reader, Fred Ainslie, responded in a letter to an earlier review by Neuhaus of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.

* On this issue, to which a number of contributors also refer, see Richard E. Morgan's article, "Republicans for Quotas," beginning on page 51.—ED.

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"Richard John Neuhaus suggests," this reader wrote, "that the Holocaust is 'our only culturally available icon of absolute evil.' What about the monstrosity of abortion?" He then went on to describe abortion as "the number-one problem in America today." Neuhaus replied to this letter as follows:

> Abortion is certainly the moral enormity that Mr. Ainslie suggests. Because, unfortunately, so many are blind to its reality, it is not the "culturally available" icon of absolute evil that the Holocaust is. We must work and hope that this will change.

It is only with great difficulty that I can entertain the idea that abortion is an "icon of absolute evil" to be placed alongside the Holocaust. Indeed, that idea, even if taken as a theoretical exercise, strikes me as, precisely, a "moral enormity." Nevertheless, I must concede that to someone who sincerely believes that every abortion, no matter at what point it occurs in the development of a pregnancy, is an act of homicide, it must logically appear as absolutely evil and, given its frequency today, as America's number-one problem. It is also logical that, this being the case, one's position on abortion will become the most important litmus test of moral and political acceptability.

I myself do not hold this position on abortion (though, for good reasons, I am closer to a pro-life than to a pro-choice position, at least as these views are defined in America today). But, what is more germane to this discussion, most Americans do not hold such a position, either. Like me, they are somewhere in the middle. That being so, abortion as an "icon of absolute evil" is thoroughly implausible, as is the aforementioned litmus test. (Incidentally, if abortion *is* taken as the key test of political legitimacy, the only democracy that, to my knowledge, would pass this test is the Republic of Ireland—though I understand that too is about to change. In any case, Ireland, undoubtedly a pleasant country, is hardly the last best hope of political legitimacy.)

The conservative mandate on the "values" issues is to spell out an authentically conservative position without falling into a radicalizing mood that proposes nonnegotiable absolutes. Such a position, I believe, could persuade a broad spectrum within the electorate. Most, but not all, of these issues belong in the political arena, and most can be dealt with by reversing the "long march through the institutions" which the Left began in the 1960's. Put differently, the conservative mandate is to build a politically viable social and cultural platform.

I think I hear a reader's response to the preceding paragraph: put up or shut up! Fair enough. I hope to put up in the near future.

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Walter Berns

Years ago (how many, I do not remember) I was on a panel with the late Russell Kirk, the doyen of the paleoconservatives, and sitting behind him when, at the podium, he outlined his plan for a Christian commonwealth. Rather rudely, I must admit, I interrupted him by asking, in a voice audible throughout the room, "What are you going to do with us Jews?" The question obviously took him aback, first because he knew I was not Jewish, but most of all, I suspect, because it had never occurred to him to ask it, or to have to answer it. After a short pause, he mumbled something to the effect that, of course, he did not mean to exclude Jews or anyone else.

Having raised the question, I felt obliged to point out that the Constitution provides a better answer: by separating church and state, I said, the Founders intended to provide (in the words of the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*) a haven "for all sorts and conditions of men," and the foundation of this haven—safe for the Jews and safe for the rest of us—was not Christianity, and certainly not the church of that prayerbook, but liberty of conscience, a liberal principle whose provenance was John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*.

Russell Kirk had become famous among paleoconservatives, in part, by arguing that John Locke had nothing to do with the Constitution; in effect, Kirk denied its liberal foundation. As he saw it, the Constitution was the work of men inspired by the "conservative" Edmund Burke. This paleoconservative misunderstanding has now been carried one step further by Father

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Richard John Neuhaus, a former Lutheran minister and now a Catholic priest.

As Neuhaus sees it, the Constitution is essentially a religious document, embodying the moral law, and specifically—as some of his fellow essayists in the November 1996 *First Things* make explicit—the natural law as espoused by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and enunciated in various papal encyclicals even today. From this religious perspective, and with the help of his colleagues, Neuhaus examines recent decisions of the courts, especially the abortion, assisted-suicide, and Colorado "gay-rights" decisions, and concludes that the "regime" has become "morally illegitimate," rather like Nazi Germany. From the same perspective, he then pronounces anathema on this regime, by which he means "the actual, existing system of [American] government." Finally, appealing to what he says is one of "the most elementary principles of Western civilization," he suggests that the time has come when "conscientious citizens" might properly engage in seditious activities "ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution."

Of course, Neuhaus is right about the courts and the judges. Self-righteous zealots (not unlike Neuhaus in that respect), they have indeed usurped power that the Constitution assigns to other agencies of the government or to the states. Two years ago, for example, the Supreme Court ruled that a Colorado constitutional amendment, denying *special* rights to homosexuals, violated the federal Constitution because, when adopting it, the voters had acted out of "animus." Then, even since Neuhaus wrote, a federal district court judge suspended the implementation of the California Civil Rights Initiative (which had received the support of 54 percent of the people), arguing that the provision, by *prohibiting* discrimination on the basis of race or sex, could be held to deny blacks and women the equal protection of the laws.

Playing ducks and drakes with legislative language is not unprecedented. The California initiative was modeled on the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 which, beginning with the *Weber* case in 1979, has been knowingly and willfully misread by the Supreme Court. For proof of this assertion, consider the comment made by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in a 1987 case: "As Justice Scalia illuminates with excruciating clarity, [this section of the Act] has been interpreted by *Weber* and succeeding cases to permit what its language read literally would prohibit." She then proceeded to join not Scalia in dissent but the majority in its deliberate misreading of the Act. To paraphrase Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "What is law to her or she to law that she should weep for it?"

As I said, Neuhaus is right about the judges, but he is wrong about almost everything else. Our Founders—"the patriots of '76," as Lincoln called them—did not justify their taking up of arms by claiming that George III had violated the principles of morality, "especially traditional morality, and most especially morality associated with religion" (to use Neuhaus's words). To have done so would have involved them (Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, and the rest) in a dispute with a king who represented "traditional morality, and most especially morality associated with religion." After all, George claimed to rule by the grace of God (*Dei gratia rex*), and, in support of this claim, he (or his schoolmen supporters) referred to the Bible, beginning with the first chapter of Genesis. To have disputed him on religious grounds would have required the Founders to engage in the kind of scriptural exegesis that Locke employed against Sir Robert Filmer, the defender of divine right; and this, quite obviously, they did not do.

Traditional morality? On the contrary, immediately after adopting the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed a committee—consisting again of Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin—to "prepare a device for a Seal of the United States of North America," and on that Great Seal appear these words (they are on every dollar bill), *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, meaning, a *new* order of the ages, new because it was the first to recognize the rights of man, and then to give them constitutional protection. In the words of James Madison, the Founders "accomplished a revolution which has no parallel in the annals of human society." It is the Constitution, the product of that revolution, and not a recondite "moral law," that the President swears to "protect and defend," the members of Congress to "support," and the judges to "support and defend."

THE FOUNDERS were proud of their work. The Constitution, they said, provided a remedy for the "diseases" most incident to democratic government, and *The Federalist* (written to persuade the people to give it their consent) leaves no doubt as to what they understood to be a disease: zealous opinions "concerning re-

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ligion," "tyrannical majorities," "angry and malignant passions," "a factious spirit," the dangerous ambition that "often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people," and those who begin their careers "by paying obsequious court to the people, commencing demagogues and ending tyrants."

To guard against these democratic diseases, or vices, the Constitution, in addition to consigning religion to the private sphere by separating church and state, withholds powers, separates powers, and excludes the people "*in their collective capacity*" from any share in the exercise of these powers. In a word, republican (or limited) government would be possible under a Constitution that excluded, or at least inhibited, the zealous, the angry, the morally indignant; and this, in turn, depended on confining the business of government to issues that did not give rise to zeal, anger, or moral indignation.

Throughout most of our history—if we ignore the slavery issue and the Civil War—the Constitution succeeded in doing this. Calvin Coolidge was not altogether wrong when he said the nation's business was business. James Madison said much the same thing in *Federalist #10*. The government's business, he said, or at least its "first object," is the protection of men's "different and unequal faculties," especially those "from which the rights of property originate." The result would be a variety of interests—landed, manufacturing, mercantile, moneyed—and regulating these various and interfering interests is "the principal task of modern legislation." Although Madison acknowledged that republican government especially requires a "sufficient virtue" in the people, he said nothing about the power to inculcate it.

On the other hand, the Constitution was adopted by a people whose character was formed by, and would continue to live under, the laws and institutions of an older order, an order that was, to some extent at least, preserved in and fostered by state constitutions and state law. Whether out of habit or as deliberate policy, the states continued to foster family life and moral education, and to prohibit practices (the publication of obscene material, for example) that threatened or jeopardized them. No longer; the Supreme Court put an end to that, and by doing so provoked Richard Neuhaus's angry and morally indignant discourse.

But no good will come of it. On the contrary, he has already caused a breach in conservative ranks that is not likely to be closed, and, even worse, his call for direct (and unconstitutional) action will confirm the opinion, held by many Americans, some of them Republicans, that religious conservatives are extremists and are not to be trusted.

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William F. Buckley, Jr.

Two years ago, after the Gingrich political upset, we heard from two sets of voices that what had happened should not be thought of as a revolution. One spoke for the ideologically threatened, who said that this was a freak election, that the upset was the result of clever machinations by Republican organizers who had succeeded in catalyzing a dramatic change in congressional personnel, but not one that registered true change in national political disposition. The other voices (I remember Charles Krauthammer's among them) were saying: "This is not a revolution in any acceptable sense of the word. Revolutions overthrow regimes and basic ideological structures. What happened is much less than that. Whatever the Gingrich people do, it will be meliorist, not revolutionary."

Somewhere in between is what November 1994 was: a genuine alteration in political direction and public attitudes. For some of us the single most propulsive catalyst in the collapse of Communism was Reagan's calling the Soviet Union an evil empire. So (we believe), the most important event brought on by the Gingrich election was President Clinton's declaration in January 1996 that the age of big government was over. That statement would not have been made if 1994 had gone differently.

How, then, should conservatives interpret the events of last November? They confirmed that what had happened two years before was not a revolution. Nor was the victory of Clinton a restoration. The rebuke of 1994 had been less than the king's removal, let alone his beheading.

Conservatives could take comfort, notwith-

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standing the reelection of Bill Clinton, that Congress remained in friendly hands, even if its spirit was dampened. Clinton's victory was less than a rejection of conservative advances. It was a validation of the relative strengths of an incumbent, in good times. What was greatly missed was that crisp satisfaction that losers sometimes walk away with when their spokesman clearly won the debate, never mind that the crowd, or the judges, went to the other man. Barry Goldwater gave us that in 1964. Dole did not. And not because he is witless or lacking in resources, but because the vision-thing never quite crystallized, and so his thoughts and prescriptions were never airborne.

WAS DOLE made mute by conflicts of interest among his constituents? That explanation is heard, and the editors of COMMENTARY direct our attention to the disparate concerns of social and economic reformists, following the lead of Irwin M. Stelzer.

The late Herman Kahn, speaking on *Firing Line* fifteen years ago about democratic discourse, illustrated his position, which was that political affinities cannot hope to crash through too many frontiers, progressively attenuated. You have here (he said, drawing a circle with his right hand) the rigid pacifists. Imagine them inhabiting a circle tangential to a second circle, in which the unilateral-disarmament people dwell. Next are the joint-disarmament people; after that, the liberationists; and, finally, the preemptive-war advocates. The people in the first circle, said Kahn, simply cannot talk to inhabitants of the fifth. It is a waste of time to reach out, in political discourse, any further than to the people next door, or perhaps two doors down.

Is this a problem among contemporary conservatives in America? Kahn's law would seem to operate vividly in respect of abortion; yet something is left out. If the fetus is mere tissue (a "tomato," in the nice metaphor of a *National Review* correspondent), then the protection of it is, so to speak, merely the concern of vegetarians. Certainly the hard abortion-rights people have a problem talking to those who say an abortion is wrong even if the mother's life is threatened.

But the choice advocate has sentient membranes which, begging Herman Kahn's leave, do reach way over, in acknowledging the primacy-of-life question (the mother's; the child's), right across the circle chart. And the apparent impasse over fetal rights does not, and should not, proscribe coalitions. There are abortion-rights people who are attracted to other compass points in the conservative universe. Why? Well, why not?

A creative political portraitist can discern latent affinities. The utilitarian imperative is a magnet. Some (privately) value the utilitarian uses of abortion. They are attracted to other policies with utilitarian emphasis. The free-market people are whole-hearted utilitarians. Parse that: utilitarian criteria encourage individualism, and the individual's rights, and these bring to mind . . . Judeo-Christian postulates about human life. And lo, the sucking sound one hears is the whirl of thought and feeling that brings together those who value life even if they are not agreed on when life begins.

The interests of the community are not to be gainsaid, but the individual is at the core of things, and is not to be dealt with offhandedly, not at abortion clinics or euthanasia wards, not by disqualifications under affirmative action or by multiculturalist Procrusteanism of the kind that, twenty years ago, had some people saying there was no difference between George Washington and Ho Chi Minh.

The liaisons are there, I think, between the social and the economic reformers, and as for the matter of how to address the general public, one always learns. Election monitors tell us that the softly stated positions were found the most attractive in the general election. That should not surprise. In nonrevolutionary situations, most voters are not drawn to reductionist formulations, any more than, at first, Abraham Lincoln was. Most of those who believe in equal treatment under the law feel also a need to encourage measures aimed at accelerating upward mobility, provided they are not effected by racial or ethnic discrimination. Pro-lifers are substantially mollified by such meliorism as was attempted by Governor Casey of Pennsylvania, who asked not for repeal of *Roe* v. *Wade*, but for mitigation of the licenses it gave. Opponents of the welfare state do not call out for the abolition of Social Security.

THE EXASPERATION of the essayists who wrote for *First Things* reveals an impatience with democratic counsels that enjoin measured advance but tolerate what appears to be total acquiescence in a deteriorating situation, with the Supreme Court as supreme moral arbiter. Among the contributors, Judge Bork's exasperation with the reasoning of the Court leads him to radical proposals, including an end to the authority of the Court to invalidate laws. Hadley

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Arkes wonders what is left, in present circumstances, of that which binds the citizen, through loyalty, to a regime.

On the issue of a social safety net, compromise is easy to understand: this side of that far-off circle in which Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard moon with each other. Compromise on questions of racial discrimination is not easy and, for some, not possible. So with human life—some say tomato, some say it's a human being.

The benumbing experience of the 1996 election, as noted, is the sense that the hard issues were not examined. That is why some wonder whether there are other means than conventional democratic politics to assert one's vital position. The conservatives' answer is, usually, No: we can only ask for more heat, and pray that it will bring illumination.

Yes, but we can also think out loud, as they did in *First Things*.

William F. Buckley, Jr. *is editor-at-large of* National Review *and host of* Firing Line. *His most recent book is* The Right Word.

Midge Decter

The sorry pundits of CNN to the contrary notwithstanding, Republicanism—capital R—has never been the name of conservative desire. It is just that for those who still pin at least some hopes on the outcomes of elections, the GOP is all there is. Of course, once in living memory there was a President, Ronald Reagan—a Republican, to be sure—who could at least comprehend what conservatives were talking about, and for that alone we were all grateful enough to come within a hair of deifying him. And again in 1994, some among us were sufficiently full of leftover longing to declare a new shift in the balance of congressional power our "revolution."

But there can be no reliably, steadfastly conservative White House in the United States of America, just as there can be no sudden conservative congressional revolution. The country does not work that way. And in truth, we should all be on our knees in gratitude that it does not. For, let us never forget, whatever is sauce for the goose can on some propitious day become sauce for the gander. Thirty years ago, after all, there were leftists in our midst who also proclaimed a "revolution"—indeed, a variety of interlocking revolutions—and the country was saved from them not so much by the countervailing force of conservatism as by the stolidity and, yes, basic contentment of the general populace.

When this stolidity works against us, as in so many ways it does today, we find the condition of the country infuriating and even dangerous. We are wrong to find it so. We must remember that it has taken 50 (some would say 60) years of creeping liberalism to bring us to the place where a whole group of intelligent and educated people can no longer define a family, or say with certainty what differentiates men and women, or muster a simple argument against teen-age sexual promiscuity or drug use, or discern a difference between heterosexual and homosexual lovemaking, or straightforwardly clarify their views on such subjects as incest, child pornography, or even—God help us and the teachers' unions—the abomination that currently travels under the name of "man-boy love." Small wonder, then, that they cannot find a decent way through the rather more clouded issues of abortion and assisted suicide. How many years may it take us to climb back up these slippery slopes?

Those whom Irwin M. Stelzer calls "economic conservatives"—budget balancers, tax cutters, debt hawks, and, in general, opponents of the welfare state in the name of economic good sense—have sometimes been known to stake a successful claim to the ear of Republican officialdom, especially of late. Until a minute ago, however, most of these same people have had virtually no thought for the slow poison that has for so long now been seeping into the national psyche. That is precisely why they were unable to field a serious contender in the 1996 presidential race.

Be that as it may, the word "revolution" and all its careless kindred expressions ought to be stricken from the conservative vocabulary. Rhetoric counts, and conservatives are anyway far too quick to disappointment these days: perhaps because they have had too many disappointments, perhaps because, *sub specie aeternitatis*, they have had too few. Whatever the reason, they have lately seemed to find it all too dangerously easy to beguile themselves with promises that they are about to defund this and wipe away that and reinvent the other. And then, up against the

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sluggishness and obduracy of democratic society—that blessed sluggishness and obduracy which have enabled us to slog intact through crises and wars and unholy social novelties—many of them have become all too quick to cry foul.

This is a gesture, bespeaking a state of mind, that once was and ought to remain alien to the conservative temperament. But it is what happened to my dear friends at *First Things*, who thought about the difficulty of overcoming the oligarchic arrogance of the Supreme Court and flew off the handle.

TODAY'S COURT, to be sure, is not what the Founders had in mind, and perhaps someone will find a decent and nondisruptive way to have it returned to its intended position above the fray. Perhaps, indeed, Robert Bork, who has written about these matters both in a book, *The Tempting of America*, and in the *First Things* symposium, knows how to bring this about. I tend to doubt it, because he seems to me too outraged by the Court's misbehavior and too unhappy with what he sees as the public's complaisance to be able to come up with a truly conservative prescription.

Something, nevertheless, is happening in that vast American community out there that lives beyond the reach of ideology and even to a great extent beyond politics. It is—slowly and largely incoherently, as is its wont—growing deeply unhappy with what liberalism hath wrought. One day, then, it will be our turn. And on that day even the Supreme Court, protected as it is from the popular intention, will change course. For it is important not to forget that the liberal (more properly called radical) "auras and penumbras" that the Court was pleased to find in the Constitution were placed there first by the attitudes of the culture, and the damage done thereby will in the end be redressed in the same way. Meanwhile, in the words of the poet, ours but to do and die.

Finally, COMMENTARY asks about the various stumbling blocks to conservative unity represented by the disagreements among us over foreign policy, immigration, trade, etc. But what is there to say on the subject? Such disagreements, pursued with varying degrees of heat and civility, have in one form or another been endemic throughout American history. What holds us under one tent—to use the current popular image—is our common loathing for what liberalism has done to the American ethos. What will drive us apart, and has to some extent in very limited quarters already done so, are not differences over matters of policy but differences in bedrock attitudes toward the United States of America. There are those of us who still have the good sense—the good conservative sense—to regard it, sins and shortcomings and all, as a blessed place in which to live.

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David Frum

THIS MAY sound flippant, but maybe the big mistake the editors of *First Things* made was publishing their symposium too late: so zealously was Bill Clinton mimicking cultural conservatism in 1996 that if the magazine had come out three months earlier, we might well have been treated to a few presidential musings on the legitimacy of the American regime.

Those of us, myself very much included, who cheered as the Republican Congress took on the Medicare problem in 1995 probably are not the best guides to what is and what is not politically responsible. It is almost something of a relief to hear some other faction of the conservative movement accused of irresponsibility. It turns out that there is, after all, something one can say that is more shocking than that senior citizens ought to pay an extra $6 a month toward their health-care bills.

There are large and continuing divisions among conservatives. In my view, the gravest and most intractable of them involve issues of nationality, such as immigration, trade, and America's overseas commitments. Compared to those splits, the disagreements between religious or cultural conservatives and economic conservatives loom small.

In fact, before engaging in any more expressions of mutual exasperation, it might be worthwhile to reflect how very much religious or cultural conservatives and economic conservatives still have in

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common. Look at the 1996 election returns. You hear it said again and again that Bob Dole lost the presidency because of the women's vote. But which women? Married women gave Clinton only a very modest preference: 48 percent of them voted for the President, 43 percent for Dole. Clinton owed his huge female landslide to the votes of unmarried women: he won 62 percent of their votes, a victory of FDR-like proportions.

Who are these women who—Paula Jones or no Paula Jones—seem so keen on the President? You probably know at least one of them yourself. She is the receptionist in your office, whose husband has just left home and who must now keep a car, dress for work, and raise two kids on $22,000 a year, plus what child support she can extract. She is the woman ahead of you at the grocery store who is paying for her purchases with food stamps. She is the unmarried thirty-eight-year-old account manager who sips her coffee at a desk surmounted by photographs of her four cats.

There are about 40 million of these women in America: 10 million widows, 10 million divorced women, 5 million unmarried mothers, 15 million single childless women. These 40 million women form a new American proletariat. They are more likely than most Americans to be poor. They are more likely to depend on government for help, either directly (welfare, Social Security, food stamps, Medicaid) or indirectly (government collection of child support, subsidized day-care). They are more hostile to or alienated from the institutions of American society than are their married sisters: while polls find that married women are very nearly as conservative in their politics as men, unmarried women veer sharply to the Left.

And American society seems to be producing more and more unmarried women all the time. In 1970, nearly 70 percent of adult American women were married. That proportion has since fallen dramatically: to 63 percent in 1980, 60 percent in 1990, and 59 percent today. And divorce is by far the most important cause of this social transformation.

Economic conservatives of a certain sort get all twitchy when social conservatives nag them about the break-up of the family. Sophisticated people want to talk about capital formation and the deficit; they imagine that it is only the Savonarolas who would fret about divorce, illegitimacy, and the dwindling vitality of marriage and family in America.

In fact, however, the cultural changes that worry social conservatives are likely to make it much more difficult for economic conservatives to win elections in the years ahead. What constituency can there be for Social Security reform and reductions in the welfare functions of government in a society where an ever-rising proportion of the female electorate—which is 52 percent of the total electorate—has come to depend on Social Security and welfare? It has been said that the Republicans are the "daddy" party and the Democrats are the "mommy" party. What are the chances for the "daddy" party in a country where more and more women are furious at the daddy they know best?

Historically, the Democrats have been the party of national particularism. A century and a half ago, Democratic particularism took the form of sectionalism: championing the interests of some states against the interest of the whole country. From the 1930's until the 1970's, the Democratic party flourished by using the power of government to favor some economic classes over others. Today, that same tradition of particularism takes the form of "diversity": championing the particular interests of single women and favored ethnic groups. The more intensely ethnic groups resent one another, the worse the mistrust between women and men, the better the Democrats do.

Republicans, by contrast, have for 150 years vindicated the national interest. They stood for the Union against the states and for the common economic good against the New Deal. In today's context, the party's historic role as the champion of national unity requires it to defend the ideals of color-blindness before the law and the integrity of the family in public policy. You can call that social conservatism if you want to; the task remains essential under any name.

And if my fellow economic conservatives bristle in discomfort at the topics and problems that matter to social conservatives, well, a glance at the exit polls and a quick calculation of what the country's demographics will soon look like if family trends do not change should help them to understand this truth: if the social conservatives fail to win their argument, the economic conservatives will not be winning any more elections.

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Francis Fukuyama

I AM CONSTANTLY struck by the extent to which the cultural tone of the country has shifted in a conservative direction from a generation ago, when I was in college. While I understand the anger of many of the contributors to the *First Things* symposium over the direction taken by the Supreme Court in recent years, the underlying social reality is very different: markets and private competition have never in my memory had the kind of pervasive legitimacy they do today, while concern over moral decline and traditional social issues has risen substantially. The agenda of the Left has crumbled: whereas a generation ago it was intent on completing the welfare state along European lines, today it is fighting a rearguard action to preserve what elements it can of the postwar social safety net. I take it as an interesting sign of the times that Michael J. Sandel, a man of the Left, could publish a book in 1996 called *Democracy's Discontents*, the first half of which contains a critique of the contemporary courts' "procedural liberalism" that might have been written by Father Richard John Neuhaus. Moreover, while President Clinton was reelected last November, we should bear in mind that in the second half of his first term he positioned himself as the most conservative Democratic president of the postwar period. In terms of underlying attitudes, then, things have not been better in a long time.

The problem is to translate this conservative social mood into a political coalition that can win power and implement an agenda. The present-day conservative movement is, of course, divided along the lines suggested by the editors of COMMENTARY, the division between the economic and social conservatives being the most important. In broader perspective, however, these divisions are only to be expected in an American political movement, and would be inevitable in a governing party, given the underlying cleavages within the society itself. The current conservative coalition is no less diverse than the New Deal coalition of working-class Catholics, blacks, Southerners, and intellectuals that dominated American politics for two generations. In fact, the recent realignment of the South into the Republican camp, and the increasing concentration of Democratic support in the older industrial areas of the Northeast, has made both parties considerably more homogeneous than they once were. The task for conservatives is to unite the existing diverse elements within the Republican party around a coherent set of issues, and find a suitable leader who can articulate them.

MANY MAINSTREAM Republicans, including Bob Dole during last year's campaign, are uncomfortable with the conservative social agenda, or else feel that it is too divisive. The obvious way out seemed to be to concentrate on economic issues like tax cuts. This strategy proved disastrous, particularly in a year when the economy was extraordinarily strong in terms of inflation, employment, and general competitiveness. But the difficulty was not that Republican tax-cutting proposals were not radical enough, or that the Republicans should have pushed for a Forbes-like flat tax. This strategy works in Republican primaries but not in general elections, because most voters simply (and rightly) do not believe in the version of supply-side economics which says that tax cuts will be self-financing. Most people are closer to what used to be the old Republican orthodoxy that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

This is particularly true for two groups of voters who were critical in getting Ronald Reagan elected in 1980, and who will be essential to the creation of a governing Republican majority: working-class men, and women of all social classes. For many years now, the so-called "Reagan Democrats" have been out of sorts with the elites and interest groups running the Democratic party, largely because of what they perceive as the excesses of the cultural Left. They have no objective interest, however, in radical tax-cutting or other elements of the Right's economic agenda: they will not benefit nearly as much from such moves as the wealthy, and they stand to see important benefits like Medicare and Social Security cut more deeply than they would otherwise be, to finance the resulting revenue shortfall. The same applies to women, who tend to be less wealthy as a group and more dependent on a host of government programs.

On the other hand, the conservative *social* agenda, if handled properly, could have been a much more powerful issue in the election campaign. Despite recent declines in violent crime, William J. Bennett's index of leading cultural indicators is much more solidly negative, and speaks much more directly to what troubles many Americans, than are the nation's economic indicators. Both the Reagan Democrats and

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women raising families understand that bad things have been happening to their children, that the public-education system has failed them, and that there is something morally troubling about the smug self-satisfaction of baby-boom generation leaders like Bill and Hillary Clinton. Had the Dole campaign focused on the broad issue of moral decline, it could have framed the "character" issue properly and created a context in which to attack an otherwise vulnerable President in a way that would not have looked mean-spirited or desperate.

The problem, then, to repeat, is how to frame the conservative social agenda. This is where the *First Things* debate becomes relevant. It is very hard to address the issue of moral decline without addressing the issue of religion, and conservatives have to proceed carefully here if they are to build a governing coalition.

Over the past couple of generations there has been a monumental cultural disestablishment in the United States, the effect of which is that the country's earlier Protestant-Christian foundations can no longer be taken for granted. One of the staples of the scholarly literature on American exceptionalism used to be that American conservatives were different from conservatives anywhere else in the world because they were actually Lockean liberals—that is, believers in limited government and laissez-faire, and reconciled to the creative-destructive energies of a capitalism that was constantly remaking the social order. This could be the case only because there was a substantial degree of cultural consensus among political elites, Right and Left, on matters like religion and values. There was no tension, in other words, between the country's Lockean liberal political order and its sectarian Protestant cultural inheritance, because the latter could be taken for granted.

The cultural disestablishment of that earlier elite is now a fact of life. One consequence is that many religious conservatives see the Lockean liberal order, shorn of its cultural context, as a threat to their core interests. And indeed, there is relatively little in classical liberalism that can help one make principled arguments against gay marriage or abortion, or to defend traditional family values.

Can a conservative social agenda be formulated that will remain respectful of religious practice, while not seeming to be driven by primarily religious forces or concerns? The problem with the *First Things* symposium is that it simply confirms the view of many nonreligious people that Christian conservatives are a somewhat nutty and out-of-touch interest group. While I do not expect to see Richard John Neuhaus holed up in a farmhouse shooting it out with ATF officers anytime soon, it is hard to understand what other course of action is logically implied by his raising the question as to whether the American "regime" is fundamentally illegitimate and may even have to be opposed by force.

Framing issues properly means, among other things, making a broad-based case against an undemocratic and imperial judiciary—a case that does not reduce to a desire to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*. The opportunity to make such a case may emerge if the lower courts succeed in legalizing gay marriage, since this is an issue where a large majority of Americans would clearly find their wishes being overturned. Moreover, as Joseph P. Viteritti recently noted in Commentary ("The Last Freedom," November 1996), the First Amendment prohibits laws constraining the "free exercise" of religion, and there are clear constitutional grounds for public authorities to take a more tolerant view of religion.

The American political system is clearly reformable. The social consensus for change exists, and the proper political tools are available to bring it about. As Dennis Teti remarked in a reply to the *First Things* symposium (in that magazine's January 1997 issue), the country has faced and surmounted much more serious political and moral problems before, such as when the Court handed down the *Dred Scott* decision. It is particularly ironic that any conservative should choose this particular moment to decide that things are hopeless, or that the only principled alternative is to drop out altogether.

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Mark Helprin

Once again the Republican party has failed to win the presidency for want of consistency and valor. Refusing to fight for principle and

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deathly afraid of loss, it lost without principle and died a fearful death. As if moved by the capitulationist impulse of his opponent's foreign policy, the Republican nominee, a valorous man too steeped in calculation, would neither attack his opposition nor vigorously promote his own program.

I admit to a certain responsibility in the outcome, having stood publicly very early for Senator Dole and having written speeches for him. Though I believed that, put to the test, he would be direct and decisive, he was neither. But I comfort myself in thinking that had I never written newspaper columns, had I never spoken on his behalf, had I never been born, Bob Dole would have captured the Republican nomination and gone on to lose the election. Of course, had he won I might not have been so dismissive of my own effect, but there is no doubt that he would have been.

The fact remains that in 1996 the Republican party spoke in the soft and unduly dainty language of its opponents, thinking that this was the way to win. Needless to say, it was not, for although it was appropriate to the message of the Democrats it was at variance with that of the Republicans. The former are proponents of a revolution in American life in which the tough talk came in the 60's and the sweet talk comes now. But though their revolution may be swathed in positiveness and pleasantries it is a revolution nonetheless.

It is a revolution in which individual rights have become group rights, in which responsibility has become entitlement, marriage has become divorce, birth has become abortion, medicine has become euthanasia, homosexuality is a norm, murder is neither a surprise nor necessarily punishable, pornography is piped into almost every home, gambling is legal, drugs are rife, students think Alaska is an island south of Los Angeles, and mothers of small children are sent off to war with great fanfare and pride. The catalogue of this revolution is a record of modern life, too vast to be printed here, that every day becomes more voluminous, to the wonder and dismay of a large and seemingly powerless proportion of the population, perhaps even a majority, shouldered aside by lesser numbers of more agile true believers.

True believers who, it is important to note, speak so dishonestly as to transform abortion and euthanasia, for example, into "reproductive health," "choice," and a "right to die." When faced with these and similar distortions, conservatives have generally tried to correct them, but that, being laborious and unexciting, is not a forceful attraction in the frenetic politics of the day, or to audiences used to one-second cutaways and uninterested in the difficulties of distinction.

Nor does retaliation suffice. I used to say, at dinner parties, "If you persist in calling the Strategic Defense Initiative 'Star Wars,' I will have to call Aid to Families with Dependent Children 'Welfare Cadillacs.'" This was ineffective because, while my interlocutors understood that AFDC is not "Welfare Cadillacs" (it is not), they also "understood" that SDI was "Star Wars."

Thus armored, they win, and the revolution that is the real revolution continues. Sixteen years after the beginning of the Reagan "revolution," and in the second term of a Republican congressional "revolution," what signs, indications, evidences, or demonstrations of "a great change in affairs or in some particular thing" (to quote the *Oxford English Dictionary*) have we? None, other than those of the revolution that in the 60's burst out like a fire that had been building beneath a floor, and now smolders efficiently with Hillary Clinton sitting uncomfortably unemphasized at its head.

IT IS hardly surprising that Republicans, making little or no headway against hundreds of thousands of Ira Magaziners,* might want to imitate them. After all, for politicians raw unqualified success is as light to a plant, and they will always find ways to bend toward its direction.

But if you are going to lose, you might as well lose with honor, rather than being a pallid imitation of Ira Magaziner. What mooncalf pronounced in 1994 that Republicans were revolutionaries? Conservatism by nature distrusts revolution. The authors of American independence were too attentive to the balance of natural forces, too wise, too experienced, and too kind to have made a revolution. Had they overturned the political system of the British Isles they might have made a revolution, but this is not what they did. They set out in a fresh direction, and the expanses of the ocean without which they could not have had their rebellion allowed them to honor the past rather than to torture and torment it in the manner of revolutionaries.

Conservatives are counterrevolutionaries by right, and this is an honorable thing if it is carefully restrained, if the counterrevolution keeps

* Magaziner, the guru of the Clinton health-care plan, is a man whose desire to redesign the world as we know it is inversely proportional to his charisma.

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clear of those with too much fire and too little judgment, with passion that seems hateful, with a taste for combat and assertion inappropriate to questions that depend for their resolution on an appeal to the American people in the language of what is self-evident.

The revolution of the 60's has led the country halfway to ruin and has more than enough momentum to finish the job. It cannot be stopped, it will not be stopped, without direct, patient, imaginative argument. And politicians who are magnetized by success rather than honor will not turn it back except occasionally by accident.

The sinews of state are rotten, America's moral life a shambles, its defense neglected almost as much as its children. The notions of right and wrong that have contributed to the slow progress of mankind over 5,000 years have been, as happens now and then, turned on their head. No party can stand in the face of this that is afraid of the wilderness, afraid of defeat, and afraid of rejection. No party can stand in the face of this that does not trust in God, that does not trust in the people to apprehend the presence and justice of God, in precisely the questions that Senator Dole was afraid to face directly in this past election.

Conservatives and, therefore, the Republican party, must make a number of steadfast arguments for the tenets to which they naturally gravitate. Rights must accrue neither to tribe nor to group but to the individual. The state must not usurp out of good intentions or otherwise the duty and privileges of the family. The government must have a weak hand at home and a strong hand abroad. Power must flow back to state, city, and citizen. Individuals, rather than being always directed and always excused, must be free and accountable. The weak must be protected, whether they be on the brink of birth or at the door of death.

Conservatives and, therefore, the Republican party, must argue steadfastly against the idea that man can engineer man's happiness, or that it is owed to him by his government, or that it is primarily material. They must reassert that work and genius deserve not penalty but reward, and that luck is not an affront to those who do not have it but a gift to those who do. They must argue, and emphasize, that man is not his own creator, and that the first requirement of good government is restraint. They must confront and resist at every level the love of coercion and passion for decree that are so fascinating to the rigidly unimaginative mind, the sense that all flows from the proclamation of human authorities.

And they must be unafraid to do all these things, and more, with the kind of honesty and plain speaking that have eluded them of late in their quest not for right but for victory. The sectors of the party that live by the threat to fall away should by all means be encouraged to make good on what they promise. Let them form their own parties or join another. In their actions and beliefs they have done so anyway already. The platform planks against abortion on demand and for free trade have proved no hindrance to Republican presidential victories except when the nominee agonizes over them. Four years hence, lines should be drawn more distinctly and at greater risk, if only to test the proposition that clarity and honesty are still rewarded by a democratic electorate. I believe that, given clarity and honesty, the American people will choose them, not only decisively but in great number. In 1996 they did not have that choice, and in a race of nipping and tucking they went with the candidate who nipped and tucked the best.

Is it such a difficult thing, then, to speak forthrightly, to contest fundamental principles, to risk defeat, to be concerned primarily with right and honor? Of course not. These things are the best rewards. They are like light and air. They are what we need, and all we need. And they are there for the taking.

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Gertrude Himmelfarb

Revolution, like death, concentrates the mind wonderfully. Two years ago it was the "Gingrich revolution" that galvanized conservatives. Today it is the specter of revolution that hovers behind the symposium in *First Things*, raising the issue of the "legitimacy" of the American "regime."

The two "revolutions"—or near-revolutions, or visions of revolution—tell us a good deal about the

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course of American conservatism and the mood of conservatives in these two eventful years.

Two years ago, the more prudent spirits among us (Owen Harries, most notably) warned conservatives against indulging in the rhetoric, to say nothing of the reality, of revolution. That is not, we were reminded, a proper mode of conservative discourse or politics. Others, including myself, were so elated by the 1994 congressional elections and the spirited temper of our new representatives that we defended the idea (oxymoron though it is) of a "conservative revolution"—a revolution, we argued, that was really a counterrevolution, reversing some of the baneful effects of a long-entrenched welfare state.

A funny thing happened to that revolution on the way to the more recent elections. The revolutionary rhetoric was abandoned—was, in fact, discredited—while some of the reality was (or is in the process of being) fulfilled. By now the spectrum of political discourse and social policy has moved so far to the Right that liberals find themselves at the Left while conservatives approach the center. President Clinton's "vital center" is not the old liberal center described by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; it is (to Schlesinger's dismay, I suspect) a more conservative center. Today it is liberalism that is on the defensive; indeed the very word is in disrepute.

In these few years, we have begun to think the unthinkable—about welfare, Medicare, even that "third rail" of American politics, Social Security. We have even begun to do the undoable. The welfare bill is more momentous than Bill Clinton likes to make it appear, or even than some conservatives seem to think. The "devolution" of relief to the states is not merely a considerable move toward federalism (which in itself is significant). It is a considerable step toward the abolition of relief as an entitlement, a right that has been hallowed for some 60 years and that has been the linchpin of the welfare state.

Perhaps even more important, it has begun to change the ethos of society. The press now touts stories celebrating the work ethic (single mothers gamely working for a living even though welfare provides greater financial rewards). The words virtue, shame, and responsibility can now be heard, without audible quotation marks around them.

We have, in this respect at least, accomplished something like a major reform, if not a revolution. It has been confined largely to the arena of social policy and achieved through the normal workings of the political process. It has not even required any constitutional amendment, which makes it all the more commendable.

Other areas, however—the culture, the media, academia, and, most notably, the judiciary—have resisted the conservative trend. Indeed, here the situation may be getting worse rather than better. It is this, and particularly the condition of the judiciary, that is prompting a new call for revolution. And it is now that a counsel of caution is in order.

THIS NEW revolution, as the editors of *First Things* conceive it, differs from the old not only in its objective—the judiciary rather than the welfare state—but in its nature and scope. This is a revolution truly worthy of the name.

The question posed in the title of the *First Things* symposium, "The End of Democracy?," is "in no way hyperbolic," the editors assure us. "In full awareness of its far-reaching consequences," they propose to determine "whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime." The "regime"—not merely the judiciary, not even the administration of the day, but the "regime," embracing the entire system of government.

That the editors believe the regime to be actually or imminently illegitimate is suggested again and again in the introduction to the symposium. We are told that "many millions of children" have come to believe that "the government that rules them is morally illegitimate," and that "perhaps even a majority" of Americans feel that they have to choose between "God *or* country." We are reminded of the "venerable precedent" of the American Revolution, and, most ominously, of Nazi Germany: "America is not and, please God, will never become Nazi Germany, but it is only blind hubris that denies it can happen here and, in peculiarly American ways, may be happening here."

The gravamen of the charge is the "judicial usurpation of power." It is this that accounts for the "crisis of legitimacy" and the "end of democracy." But the editors of *First Things* also invoke the principle—for which they cite the authority of Western civilization and two papal encyclicals—that "laws which violate the moral law are null and void and must in conscience be disobeyed."

At this point the argument becomes confused, for it is surely not the judicial usurpation of power that either Western civilization or the papacy takes to be a violation of the moral law; the divi-

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sion of powers in the American system of government hardly has so exalted a status in the moral order. The real issue, as some of the symposium's contributors (but not the editors) make clear, is abortion and euthanasia. It is this that is the affront to moral law. And it is this that conjures up the specter of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. (A judicial usurpation of power was not one of Nazism's evils.)

It is quite true that in the United States the "oligarchic judiciary," as Robert Bork describes it, has been the worst offender in legalizing abortion and euthanasia, as well as in violating the Constitution in myriad other ways. (Although one of the most appalling cases in recent years puts the President, not the courts, in that role. It was Clinton who vetoed the congressional ban on partial-birth abortions.) But what if the legalization of abortion were the product not of the judiciary but of the legislature—if it betokened not the "end of democracy" but the very exercise of democracy? This is, in fact, the case in most Western countries, where duly elected representatives have enacted the statutes legalizing abortion (and, in some countries, euthanasia as well). Does this mean that all these regimes—democratic regimes like Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden—are also in violation of the moral law and hence illegitimate?

In America we are confronting two separate and urgent problems, the judiciary and abortion, which happen at present to coincide but which may well diverge in the future. It is the conflation of the two that gives this controversy the apocalyptic tone that it has.

If conservatives do take democracy and the Constitution seriously, if we are truly exercised by the usurpation of judicial power, we must also be prepared for the possibility that *vox populi* might differ from many of us on the subject of abortion. The polls suggest that the majority of the American people want to restrict abortion in various ways but not to criminalize it. If this is so, the conservative tone in this debate should be moral and exhortatory, to be sure, but also pragmatic, prudential, and incremental, seeking as many restrictions on abortion as the American people can be persuaded to accept, while at the same time denouncing the judiciary for flouting both the democratic will and the Constitution by prohibiting such restrictions.

Those who cannot, in good conscience, condone legal abortions have the moral as well as legal right to press their case and, if it goes against them in a properly democratic manner, they may, subject to the penalty of the law, have recourse to the alternatives mentioned in *First Things*, "ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution." But they have neither the moral nor the legal right, *in the name of democracy*, to impose their view upon the polity, any more than the judiciary today has that right.

In posing the issue in apocalyptic, revolutionary terms, *First Things* has opened a rift among conservatives that threatens to become a major fault line. American conservatism has always been a coalition of diverse groups marching under separate banners while fighting a common enemy. In the last few years that improbable alliance—of economic conservatives and social conservatives, evangelicals and secularists, federalists, pro-lifers, flat-taxers, and a variety of one-issue partisans—has succeeded in bringing about important changes in the polity and social policy.

That alliance is now in peril. With undisguised *Schadenfreude*, a liberal commentator on the controversy (perhaps misreading the names of some of the critics) describes it as a falling-out between Jews and Christians, while a Jewish publication sees it as driving "a wedge into the 'Reagan coalition.'" One conservative (or paleoconservative) reporter is pleased to find in it a repudiation of neoconservatism, while another conservative reluctantly concludes that "the Right" has succumbed to the "anti-American temptation."

What has been accomplished by all this, except to provide fodder for journalists and promote dissension among conservatives? Have any problems been raised with regard to the judiciary that were not raised before (by Judge Bork, most notably)? Have any new practical remedies, reforms, or strategies been proposed, as distinct from the ultimate recourse to civil disobedience or revolution?

Amid all this high moral posturing, it may be useful to be reminded of the old distinction between an "ethic of ultimate ends" and an "ethic of responsibility"—a distinction all the more pertinent in a democracy, where there is less than total agreement about the ultimate principles or grounds of morality, but substantial agreement about mediate, practical principles. An "ethic of responsibility" is not as elevated as an "ethic of ultimate ends." But it is all that can be achieved—and the best that can be achieved—in a democracy, where the political process

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makes it *morally*, as well as practically, incumbent upon us to be patient, prudent, and responsible.

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William Kristol

WE WERE arguing on TV about abortion—partial-birth abortion, to be precise. A fellow panelist, exasperated by my simple-mindedness, tried to explain that the issue was complicated. It involved, you see, a "clash between two of America's most cherished values, life and choice."

So this is what it has come to: life has been reduced to a value; choice has been elevated to a value; and they have the same status. Or do they? In a world of "values," there is, according to Justice Anthony Kennedy in *Romer* v. *Evans*, something questionable about laws based on "an ethic and a morality which transcend human invention." In such a world, choice is in fact the value that reigns supreme. Choice is the value of values. It is the core—the hollow core—of contemporary liberalism.

It was not ever thus. In *Federalist #1*, Alexander Hamilton suggested that Americans had the chance to establish "good government from reflection and choice." The American Founders were concerned to vindicate the dignity of human choice. But they knew they could do so only by grounding our choices in reflection about standards of good government. The task of conservatism today is to restore to our public life an understanding of such standards—of good government, of justice, of morality—that are not simply of human invention. Conservatives have not succeeded in this formidable endeavor; indeed, we have barely begun.

Beginnings are hard, as Republicans learned after their congressional victory in 1994. The American people were soon put off by the easy talk of a "Republican revolution." And who can blame them? The typical American attitude is a sensible one. We had a revolution 220 years ago; unlike almost all other revolutions, it worked out well; but most political leaders who promise revolution bring their countries to grief. Talk of a Republican revolution seemed at once misleadingly easy and dangerously extreme. Most Americans know that the task ahead is both too delicate and too fundamental for mere "revolution." What is needed is a reformation.

As it happened, the Republican revolution petered out within the year, though not before giving Bill Clinton an opportunity to stage a remarkable political recovery. His subsequent reelection stalled the conservative political realignment many of us had hoped for; but 1996 saw no resurgence of liberalism, either. The Left is, therefore, today more dependent than ever on advancing its agenda by stealth and indirection. Its preferred instruments of action are the least responsible and accountable institutions of our society. These include the courts. The contributors to the November 1996 *First Things* symposium were right to be indignant about this attempt to circumvent self-government. The editors of the journal were wrong, I think, to indulge in loose talk about the end of democracy, the moral illegitimacy of the regime, or Nazi Germany.

CONSERVATISM'S MANDATE in the years ahead is to repulse the last surges of liberal nihilism wherever they manifest themselves, including in the judiciary. But conservatism's more fundamental mandate is to take on the sacred cow of contemporary liberalism—choice. And the "choice" issue presents itself most directly, of course, in the area of abortion.

Now, all sophisticated people are supposed to wish that the abortion issue would somehow go away. At least we are supposed to urge that voices be lowered and that more moderate positions come to the fore. As a strategic matter, there is a strong case for the pro-life movement to focus more on incremental advances than on, say, a human-life amendment to the Constitution. But the truth is that abortion is today the bloody crossroads of American politics. It is where judicial liberation (from the Constitution), sexual liberation (from traditional mores), and women's liberation (from natural distinctions) come together. It is the focal point for liberalism's simultaneous assault on self-government, morals, and nature. So, challenging the judicially-imposed regime of abortion-on-demand is key to a conservative reformation in politics, in morals, and in beliefs.

If this reformation is to have any chance of success, it will have to proceed more in the spirit

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of Lincoln than of William Lloyd Garrison, whose fiery rhetoric was reprinted prominently in the November 1996 *First Things*. It will have to persuade as well as to hector. It will have to be serious about intermediate means as well as ultimate ends. And it will have to demonstrate sober understanding as well as burning concern. For at the end of the day, a conservative future requires a conservative political majority. Such a majority does not yet exist. One can assemble an anti-liberal majority, as we saw in 1994; one can produce an ambivalent majority, as we have seen in 1996. But there is as yet no conservative governing majority in this country. Creating such a majority is the radical task before us. The problem with the *First Things* symposium is that its "radicalizing mood" distracts from this truly radical task.

About a century and a half ago, John Stuart Mill famously described conservatives as the stupid party. Can they now become the intelligent party? Can they persuade Americans that choice and life cannot be equally "cherished values"? Can they restore the force of the traditional imperatives that contemporary liberalism scorns as politically incorrect? These imperatives are not complicated. They include: honor your father and your mother; be a man; choose life. It is fair to judge our social well-being by the resonance and authority of these simple commands. All, of course, are based on "an ethic and a morality which transcend human invention."

William Kristol *is editor and publisher of the* Weekly Standard.

Michael Novak

In the nature of the case, conservatives are diverse and hard to unite. It is good that they should be so. On the other hand, under threat as they are from those who love to use the power of the state to coerce them—even in the smallest details of their lives, from their smoking habits to their seat belts—conservatives must also be open to one another, cooperative, and alert to moves or utterances that are unnecessarily divisive. They need to know how to unite, as they often have done in the past.

Irwin M. Stelzer is a wonderfully shrewd commentator, but he draws too sharply the contrast between economic and social conservatives—or, rather, draws the point of division too close to the libertarian axis, so that all the compromise, it seems, must be made on the social-conservative side. As a matter of principle, libertarians want to concede no (or only a teensy bit of) scope for state action. Historically and in the real world, theirs is a state so principled that it has never existed.

This also means that the libertarian formulation misstates the aims and temper of social conservatives, exaggerating the supposed gap between them and conservatives of other sorts. It is true that one long-range aim of many (not all) social conservatives is a constitutional amendment to prohibit acts of private violence against children in the womb. This, they believe, is part of the original Lockean social contract, and also in accord with our long national tradition of jurisprudence, interrupted not by the popular will as expressed in laws democratically arrived at but by judicial usurpations of power, abetted by powerful elites. Most social conservatives say that this issue should be put, locality by locality, to the political test of democratic will.

Say what you like about this position—dispute it, oppose it—but do not say that it violates conservative principles. Libertarians on the Left and the Right may be in favor of current court rulings on abortion, but they cannot argue that our nation is now living, in this respect, under laws democratically arrived at and with the consent of the governed.

This brings us to the *First Things* imbroglio. In the wake of that magazine's November 1996 issue, a concerted effort is being made to split the ranks of conservatives, and also to split conservative Jews from conservative Christians. Serious disagreements are certainly in order. To bring those disagreements to the surface, in order to confront them, is well worth the best efforts of all of us.

My first thought was that the editors of *First Things*, moved by the tide of court decisions on abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, had surrendered to the *eros* of passionate conviction and been swept into three rhetorical excesses. The first was their use of the inherently mischievous term "regime"; the second was an imprudent use of the term "illegitimate" in a purely analytic, academic sense when it is inherently a passionate call for political action of an extreme sort; and the third was a needlessly offensive use of the cautionary ex-

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ample of Nazi Germany for the American case.

One must grant the justified anguish of the editors of *First Things* at recent actions of the courts. That anguish is widely shared, and is likely to grow as the courts continue to overreach; also, it is always good advice—anyway, for those of us of Eastern European heritage—to prepare for the worst. Nonetheless, the excesses of the editors constituted a serious breach of the first virtue of moral discourse: practical wisdom (*phronesis*). More to the point, they were not merely flaws in an otherwise sound argument; they were symptomatic of a seriously misconceived proposition.

ALTHOUGH THERE were many good points in each of the five essays that constituted the body of the November symposium, and intellectual difficulties in some, the main problem lay in the introduction. Indeed, it was found in the title given to the symposium as a whole—"The End of Democracy?"—and in the very first three paragraphs of the introduction.

The editors began this way: "Articles on 'judicial arrogance' and the 'judicial usurpation of power' are not new. The following symposium addresses those questions, often in fresh ways, but also moves beyond them." The editors then arrested our attention with a frightful burst of lightning: "The question here explored, in full awareness of its far-reaching consequences, is whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime." And then a thunderclap: "The question that is the title of this symposium is in no way hyperbolic. The subject before us is the end of democracy."

Now this, I regret to write, was ill-advised; it would have been far better had the title *been* "hyperbolic." The editors, temporarily and uncharacteristically, allowed moral passion to overpower political reason.

In fact, the symposium itself offered no credible evidence—credible even to the participants—that the end of democracy is actually upon us. While editors and symposiasts pile up gut-wrenching evidence of abuses of power and the iron reign of anti-religious ideology in law firms, the media, and above all in the courts, and while this evidence reaches indeed to judicial usurpation, it falls short of proving the end of democracy.

In living memory, all of us have worried about an "imperial congress" and an "imperial presidency." It is in the nature of a system of separated powers, amid checks and balances, to be always, or in any case regularly, out of balance. And so it now is, in the undisciplined arrogance of the courts. "It Is Time to Take on the Judges," announced a recent lead editorial in the conservative *Weekly Standard* (December 18, 1996), and even some liberals agree. The point of a system of balances, however, is not to *be* in balance, but to seek it.

Two other features of the symposium were misconceived. Scattered throughout the pages of the November *First Things*, in specially set-off boxes, were texts expressing a law-overturning passion—from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. to William Lloyd Garrison. These were presumably intended to pump up morale. But many counterbalancing texts from the tradition, calling for restraint, prudence, and patience might also have been cited, thus enlarging the context of calm deliberation.

Then, too, ominous threats were made in the symposium about the alleged scope of popular discontent in the country, and in fact much of the mail to *First Things*—and also to the *Weekly Standard*, which published a critical article on the symposium—was favorable to *First Things*. Nonetheless, in a season in which President Clinton felt able to protect partial-birth abortions over the votes of both houses of Congress and the protests of the Catholic bishops, and still came away with 54 percent of the Catholic vote and 379 electoral ballots, a highly sophisticated discussion among intellectuals is not a reliable predictor of wide popular resonance.

The gap between intellectual analysis and practical politics in human affairs is very large. This is a maxim, I am afraid, that the editors temporarily forgot, mixing up two different idioms. One of the pervasive temptations of the prophetic-minded is to overdramatize the presence of the transcendent in the issues they face, and to create a narrative structure in which they get to play witnesses, heroes, and martyrs. In T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, this is the last and most difficult temptation that Thomas à Becket has to overcome.

In a world in which too little is made of the daily presence of the transcendent in our lives, a little prophecy is much-needed salt. But a bad sauce can ruin a good dish. Many propositions in the *First Things* symposium could have won vigorous support from almost all branches of conservatism. They could, as I say, have made a nourishing dish; instead, some readers got severe indigestion, and enemies of conservatism have rejoiced.

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It is important to do what we can to remind one another of the "first things" we share. Even some who are not religious agree that there are two founts of the American sense of morality and law: Athens and Jerusalem or, otherwise put, the Lockean Enlightenment and the biblical ethic. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote of "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." So ardently did Jefferson believe that these laws were known to and shared by believers and unbelievers alike that he even wrote, for circulation among Indians in the Louisiana Purchase and elsewhere (at government expense), a stripped-down version of the moral code of Jesus, taken straight from the philosophical rather than the religious texts of the Gospels.

The point is not whether Jefferson's painstaking list of precepts would satisfy secularists—or, for that matter, believing Christians or Jews today; the point is the ease with which Jefferson worked with two traditions. And why not? It was from both of these traditions that British institutions and the common law had sprung. Blackstone, the great student of British law cited by virtually all our Founders, wrote: "Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws; that is to say, no human law should be suffered to contradict these." Observed John Adams, President after Washington: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other."

In particular cases, a nation that respects the inviolability of individual consciences will and should argue publicly about rival derivations from such sources. Only after that, out of civil argument and due process, ought to come common political decisions about how we will order our lives together, in the light of our common agreements and disagreements. This is an untidy but, in its own way, beautiful process. What we may not do is bar anyone from the common discussion because he argues only from reason or only from revelation. Both these founts are part of our inheritance; each in its own way adds solemnity, weight, and dignity to the law.

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Norman Podhoretz

I am among those who interpret last November's elections as a victory for conservatism. This is obviously the case with Congress, where the Republicans held onto their control of both houses. Moreover, most of the highly conservative members of the freshman class of 1994 were reelected to the House (despite the massive amounts of money spent by the AFL-CIO to dislodge them), and in the Senate the Republicans not only increased their margin but did so in a way that on balance left it even more conservative than before.

But of course what was perhaps even more significant was the fact that Bill Clinton won the presidency by running not as a liberal but as a conservative. To rehearse what has by now become a familiar litany: Clinton declared that "the era of big government is over"; he endorsed the conservative approaches both to welfare and crime; he came out for a balanced budget; and he signed a bill designed to head off the prospect of same-sex marriages. The great exceptions (payoffs to his two most loyal constituencies, women and blacks) were his veto of legislation banning partial-birth abortions and his intransigent support of affirmative action. Yet on neither of these issues did Bob Dole, and still less Jack Kemp, take him on, and so for all practical electoral purposes, they hardly affected his newly conservative image. On another cluster of issues that might have compromised that image—Clinton's drastic cuts in the defense budget and his opposition to missile defense—the Republicans also chose to remain silent, as they did too on questions of foreign policy in general, and especially his kowtowing to China (not that they would have had anything much to say if they had spoken up).

Many conservatives predicted that Clinton, having paraded around in stolen conservative clothes in order to appeal to an electorate that he knew had moved to the Right, would discard them after winning and, with no future elections to worry about, would execute a sharp turn to the Left. Thus far, however, they have been proved wrong. The leading liberals in the White House (Harold Ickes and George Stephanopoulos) are gone and Leon Panetta has been replaced as chief of staff by Erskine Bowles, who is markedly to his Right. So too, though possibly to a lesser extent, with Clinton's new cabinet, which seems rather less liberal than the old.

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The upshot is that conservatism showed itself alive and well in the elections of 1996. But does this mean that those who hailed the 1994 elections as a "revolution" were right? Well, I for one have always thought that "counterrevolution" was a more precise term. The demand of the voters in 1994 was for a rollback of the liberal policies and institutions that had been shaping the country for more than half a century, and that counterrevolutionary demand clearly remains in force. On the other hand, there is no comparably clear revolutionary idea of what the new shaping policies and institutions should be, and defining these will be the work of the next phase of American political life.

IN THIS context the splits in conservatism become very troubling indeed. A unified conservative movement would have played a greater role in the work ahead than the currently fractious state of conservatism will permit it to do. Yet here I disagree with the generally accepted description of the crucial fault line.

In my judgment, the really dangerous division is not the one between the "economic" and "social" conservatives, who have after all managed against all expectations to cooperate politically for quite a long time now. Nor does the real problem lie in the disagreements within the conservative community over immigration, where the two sides are beginning to find more and more common ground. The divisions on foreign policy are harder to bridge, but the debate among the interventionists, the isolationists, and the realists has thus far proceeded without generating excessive rancor. Not so the split among the "social" conservatives that has been opened up by Father Richard John Neuhaus through the *First Things* symposium and that I consider the most consequential of all.

An effort has been made by Jacob Heilbrunn, writing in the *New Republic*, to represent this split as one between Jews ("neocons" or Straussians, as he alternately describes them) and Catholics ("theocons" and Thomists). This is not the first time Heilbrunn has attacked the neoconservatives for the heinous crime of associating with Christians. A couple of years ago he laced into us for allying ourselves politically with Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition; now we are placed in the dock for having gotten mixed up with Catholics as well (in both cases for the same politically "cynical" reasons). To Heilbrunn, Christians are evidently either anti-Semitic or anti-American or both, and as such they are the "natural enemies" of Jews.

The bigotry here is as morally repulsive as Heilbrunn's incitement to a war between Christians and Jews is politically and socially pernicious. Like most other forms of bigotry, it is also based on ignorance and intellectual shoddiness.

Thus (as one grows weary of pointing out), neoconservatism is not and never has been an exclusively Jewish phenomenon. From the very beginning it included among its leading figures Protestants like Jeane Kirkpatrick, Peter L. Berger, Richard John Neuhaus, and James A. Nuechterlein, and Catholics like James Q. Wilson, Michael Novak, William J. Bennett, and George Weigel. Nor (until the *First Things* symposium) did Neuhaus's conversion from Lutheranism to Catholicism affect his identification with neoconservatism.

As for the Straussian-Thomist labels, they are equally ignorant. Very few neoconservatives were or are followers of the political philosopher Leo Strauss, and very few of the "theocons" involved in the dispute in question—including Neuhaus himself—were or are Thomists. Indeed, to the extent that the Thomists are distinguished by their belief in natural law, I myself am closer to them than I am to the Straussians. And as another prominent Catholic neoconservative, Michael Joyce of the Bradley Foundation, points out, St. Thomas Aquinas "in no way stood, as Heilbrunn charges, for a quick and impulsive resort to revolutionary violence in the face of non-Christian government conduct." In other words, whatever else may be animating the more heated participants in the *First Things* symposium, it is not the true spirit of Thomas Aquinas.

No, the split that has been created by the *First Things* symposium is not between Jews and Catholics, or between "neocons" and "theocons," or between Straussians and Thomists. Nor is it, as certain defenders of Neuhaus have in their own ignorance taken to declaring, between conservatives who are concerned about judicial usurpation of legislative prerogatives and those who are insensitive to the threat it poses to democracy. Far from having discovered this threat, *First Things* has merely joined in a clamor over the imperial judiciary that some of us have been raising for over 25 years. The only new contribution *First Things* makes is to suggest that this development has finally brought us to "the end of democracy" and that it has drained the American "regime" of "legitimacy," from which

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it follows all but explicitly that civil disobedience and even outright rebellion are warranted and even morally required.

My own reaction to all this was a letter to Neuhaus in which I stated that his position was reminiscent of "the extremist hysteria of the old counterculture of the 60's" which had driven both of us out of the Left in the first place. "Speaking of the 60's," I went on,

> back then a professor of philosophy at Columbia named Robert Paul Wolff (remember him?) said that anyone who still believed that America was a democracy belonged in an insane asylum. I responded by charging him with implicitly inciting and justifying the violent tactics of the Weathermen. Now I have to tell you in all candor that I see no significant difference between Wolff's position and the one espoused by you. . . . I am appalled by the language . . . you use to describe this country, especially your own reference to Nazi Germany; by the seditious measures you contemplate and all but advocate; and by the aid and comfort you for all practical purposes offer to the bomb-throwers among us.
>
> In short, if you ask me (and you have), it is not this "regime" (horrid term) that is illegitimate; it is your position.

To be sure, in another tactic reminiscent of the 60's, when incendiary anti-American declarations were invariably given a liberal spin to make them more palatable (the radicals were only "criticizing the government," or they were usefully "calling attention to a problem"), Neuhaus now denies (in his answer to his critics in the January 1997 *First Things*) that the symposium said what so many of us understood it as saying.

Perhaps, like some of my more irenic conservative friends, I ought to take this denial as a prudential retreat under fire from an extremist position that Neuhaus finds himself unable to continue defending; perhaps I ought to welcome it as an attempt to undo the damage the symposium did to the conservative cause. But in my unreconstructed opinion, it will take much more than a 60's-style spin to repair that damage. Nothing less than a frank and forthright recognition of error (or should I say an act of contrition?) will suffice, and of that, alas, I see no sign so far.

I HAVE ALREADY suggested that the mandate of conservatism in the years ahead is to pursue its counterrevolutionary project (which includes, as it always has done, the fight to roll back the imperial judiciary) while striving to work out the details of a more self-respecting and a more humane alternative to the social and political depredations of the liberal ethos. The anti-Americanism of the *First Things* symposium has served to undermine and besmirch this project, just as the anti-Americanism of the Left ultimately did to the ambitions of liberalism in the post-60's political wars. It is a wonder to me that my old friend Richard Neuhaus has forgotten what we learned while fighting those wars as comrades-in-arms against the radicalism we had both formerly espoused, and I can only hope and pray that he will (to wrap him ecumenically in a phrase from Jewish liturgy) "speedily and in our day" once more undergo a process of deradicalization and reemerge as a born-again neoconservative.

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Irwin M. Stelzer

THAT THE center of gravity of American politics has shifted to the Right, the November elections leave no doubt. Republicans held the Congress; more important, they captured the President, if not the presidency. To say that Clinton moved Right less out of conviction than of necessity is merely to prove the point: he had to move Right, undoubtedly taking flak in the cabinet room and in the bedroom, in order to survive. His finely attuned political antennae told him to get with the conservative program or contemplate an early return to Arkansas.

So conservatism is alive and well—or perhaps merely alive. For it is threatened from without with death by 1,000 cuts, and from within by the willingness of some—how many, and what proportion of all conservatives, no one knows—to expand the reach of the government they profess to distrust.

The threat from without stems from the President's proclivity to practice liberalism by stealth. Unable to raise taxes lest he give the lie to his calls for the end of welfare as we know it and to the era of big government, the President pro-

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ceeds with social engineering in a barely noticeable way—by imposing on business the costs once borne directly by taxpayers, in the knowledge that businesses will pass those costs on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Thus, while espousing both tax cuts and a balanced budget, the President retains within his gift such favors as time off for child-rearing or to take the cat to the vet. He need simply order businesses to extend these benefits. Meanwhile, regulation can proceed apace, unhindered by the newly conservative mood of the voters: within days of his reelection, the President had the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issue expensive new regulations on air quality, and the Corps of Engineers tighten restrictions on the use of so-called "wetlands." No legislation required; no new taxes required; no fear that too many voters will wonder where the money will come from to pay for the government's new largesse.

It is this expansion-by-stealth that concerns economic conservatives. They know that there is no free home leave, no free improvement in environmental quality. The bill will be paid in the form of higher prices or of reduced profit margins, which in turn will reduce investment in productive assets. They know, too, that any hope for shrinking the government goes a-glimmerin' when agencies like the EPA effortlessly expand, or when the government increasingly sets working conditions that were once the subject of private negotiation between employer and employee, or when the Corps of Engineers can decide what a citizen can and cannot build in his back yard if he is afflicted with a small puddle that might lead his plot to be classified as a wetland.

But the moral authority of economic conservative to resist such an expansion of government power is undermined by social conservatives who would transfer government intrusions from the boardroom into the bedroom. How to argue that the government should not be telling people what they may or may not build on their private property while at the same time arguing that it has every right to tell them what they may or may not watch on their television sets in the privacy of their homes? How to argue that the Democrats should not use the tax system as an instrument of social engineering, while at the same time demanding a child tax credit to reward parents for having children?

In short, the social conservatives, with their grand view of the role of government, drain the moral legitimacy of the program of economic conservatives who pursue the more limited goal of reducing the size and reach of government, thereby reducing the tax burden and unleashing new energies to stimulate economic growth.

THERE IS some hope, of course, that these two camps, with such opposite views of the proper level of government intrusion in daily life, still have enough in common to forge an alliance that would be to the benefit of both factions. After all, nothing unites groups so much as a common adversary. And the President and his party represent just such a unifying force. Economic conservatives know in their hearts that the President will employ every stratagem he and his team can devise to preserve activist government, to prevent further shrinkage in the welfare state, and to keep revenues flowing into the federal coffers. And they know, too, what is in store for their dreams of rolling back the regulatory state if Messrs. Bonior, Rangel, Dingell, Waxman, and their friends in the U.S. Congress regain the committee chairs they so effectively used to pile regulation on regulation, and to urge administrators on to more and more intense paroxysms of enforcement.

Social conservatives, for their part, share their economic brethren's fear and loathing of the Clintonites. They view with more than skepticism the call of a noninhaling pot user and MTV aficionado for a return to family values and school uniforms. Besides, for them the litmus test is abortion, and the President is so far out of line with mainstream thinking on this subject that even the most tolerant anti-abortionist has no way of cutting him any slack on this issue.

But alas, even if a working alliance can be brokered between the social and economic conservatives—and that is far from certain, as witness the former's desire to channel available funds into a child tax credit and the latter's desire to use those same monies for supply-side tax cuts—it will not permit the conservative revolution (or evolution, if you prefer; I will come to the real line-'em-up-against-the-wall revolutionaries in a moment) to proceed. For deference by economic conservatives to a group with so opposite a view of the degree to which government can properly intrude into our lives will inevitably scare off the great mass of voters who spend less time than the true believers in thinking about how they want to be governed.

Most people, instead of eagerly awaiting reports on the doings at weekend retreats for the

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liberal or conservative elite, examining the latest effusions of the myriad think tanks, or studying the Federal Register to learn the latest news from the regulation-writers, go about their daily lives and rely on what generally proves to be a rather shrewd appraisal of who will more or less give them what they want from government. They want to keep more of the money they earn, but not if they have to elect a movie censor to do it; they want to "get the government off of my land" (remember the old Westerns?), but not if they have to elect someone who will decide on the design of record covers; most of all, they want to be left alone, not badgered by a well-intentioned big brother to accept his notion of what separates the merely raunchy (if, indeed, merely raunchy is acceptable to the social Right) from the unacceptably obscene.

So the outlook for the conservative movement is not as bright as it might be. But it is brightened considerably by the decision of the denizens of *First Things* to come out of the closet and 'fess up to their immortal longings for a society that derives its legitimacy solely from their divinely informed approval. It has always seemed strange to me that neoconservatives, long aware that intimate relations with the totalitarian Left could only end in tears, should think they could live easily in close proximity to *First Things* conservatives who, in the end, share their hard-Left brethren's contempt for the democratic process. It is even stranger that Jewish neoconservatives should have thought they could pitch an intellectual tent broad enough to attract the prototypical former Jewish liberal "mugged by reality" and many Catholics brought up in a tradition that does not welcome dissent from its revealed truths. Jewish intellectuals may be useful exponents of some of the positions of *First Things* Catholics, but they should not expect to be partners in a governing theocracy.

Perhaps—and it is only a perhaps—the unraveling of the alliance between the neoconservatives and the *First Things* crowd will liberate the former to seek the support of more natural allies. If so, conservatism has a bright future. If not, we may be in for a Gore-y 2000.

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George Weigel

Confronted yet again by a weak and vacillating liberal mistrusted by the electorate, economic conservatism in 1996 managed to garner less than 40 percent of the presidential vote for the second election in a row—in no small part because the Republican nominee failed to ignite the enthusiasm of social conservatives and exploit the liberal candidate's most glaring vulnerability. In the wake of this political failure, might we revisit in a less wooden way the question of the relationship between conservatives whose primary concern is governmental intrusion into the market and conservatives who are chiefly motivated by questions of culture? Tensions between these groups are to be expected, especially in matters of tactical politics. But they need not be mortal enemies.

The reason has to do with the relationship between free economies and the moral culture of the societies in which those economies function. The market is not an independent variable in the free society, as we have been reminded by Michael Novak, Francis Fukuyama, and other analysts of the cultural preconditions essential for the flourishing of a free economy. Absent a public moral culture capable of disciplining and channeling the explosive human energies set free by the market, the virtues—the moral habits—essential to making the market work will wither and die. But the idea that a people's capacity for self-command has a lot to do with their ability to make the market work did not originate with contemporary social conservatives (although these conservatives have deepened and broadened our understanding of that nexus). Adam Smith, the author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as well as *The Wealth of Nations*, was no intellectual schizophrenic.

What happens when the state legitimates behaviors that erode the moral foundations of civil society, and then declares those behaviors and that legitimation beyond the reach of democratic process? When the state attempts to establish, as the official national creed, a crudely utilitarian ethic based on a distorted notion of freedom as radical individual autonomy, the free economy is in serious trouble. So is the democratic polity. Does anyone deny this? If so, to what historical warrants would they appeal in arguing for the possibility of sustaining democratic capitalism on a foundation of decadence?

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Contemporary American conservatism seems less a "movement" to me than a complex community of conversation built around certain commonly shared premises. Principled anti-Communism, which regarded Marxism-Leninism not only as a political and military threat but as a moral perversion, was one of those binding premises during the cold war. Then, sharply chiseled moral judgments were not regarded as inimical to conservative political effectiveness. On the contrary, they were regarded as essential: first, because the judgments were true in themselves; and second, because they were crucial in combating a soft liberalism and a radicalism of "moral equivalence" which could not comprehend, much less withstand, the Communist threat. So within the living memory of this symposium's participants, conservatives seem not to have been indisposed to moral argument as a part of the core, not the periphery, of public affairs.

A second premise I had assumed to be part of the conservative intellectual patrimony also had thick moral content: the premise that neither democracy nor the market was a machine that could run of itself. Put positively, the premise was that, in addition to a market economy and a democratic polity, the free society included a public moral culture that was crucial to the proper functioning of both free economics and free politics. I trust that that premise is not now being denied in some conservative quarters. If it is, then we really do face a parting of the ways. There is room for reasonable debate about the state's role in fostering that public morality; we can also debate which specific bricks are necessary to the free society's moral foundation. But the premise itself seems to me essential, and its recognition in the way we conduct our politics is crucial for American democracy. The American people have historically believed themselves to be engaged in a moral enterprise when they did their public business and when they defended their country from its enemies. To deny them the capacity to act publicly on that conviction is undemocratic.

AS SOMEONE "present at the creation" of the discussion that led to the *First Things* symposium in that journal's November 1996 issue, I can speak with some authority about its intentions. The intention, briefly, was to sharpen our sense of urgency about the present establishment of three interrelated ideas as a government-sanctioned ideology in the United States—ideas which one had assumed to be repugnant to conservatives. The first of these ideas is philosophical-anthropological: that the human person is an autonomous, self-constituting Self. The second idea is ethical: that freedom is a matter of doing what I choose precisely because I choose it. The third idea is political: that democracies must protect the exercise of freedom-as-license by autonomous selves so long as nobody in whom the state declares a "compelling interest" gets hurt.

None of these ideas has any tether to the American Founding and the Founders' understanding of republican virtue. Mixed together, they form a lethal ideological cocktail. For on this account of democracy, the only relevant actors in society are the autonomous individual and the state. Conservatives used to have a word for what lay at the end of that particular road: we called it "totalitarianism." The totalitarian temptation seems built into modernity. Democracies are not preternaturally immune to it. Our immunization comes from the moral culture that makes democracy possible.

There is a lesson to be learned here from contemporary American conservatism's most notable achievement: the collapse of Communism. Communism failed for many reasons; stupid economics was married to brutal politics and legitimated by philosophical nonsense. But the latter, the philosophical absurdities, were the key to the rest. Yes, the Communist project collapsed because of Western grit and Western military capacities and the heroism of the human-rights resistance in East Central Europe. But, at bottom, Communism failed because it was *wrong*: because it was based on a defective concept of the human person and human community—including political community and economic interaction.

A similar failure in the public philosophy of the democracies, eroding public moral culture and the virtues essential to transforming raw plurality into genuine pluralism, would have the gravest results. Autonomous selves cannot be democrats indefinitely. Autonomous selves can give no compelling account of their commitment to democratic civility, religious tolerance, or the procedures of democratic self-governance. Autonomous selves cannot imagine making the sacrifices necessary to defend freedom from its enemies.

THE LANGUAGE of "regimes" and "regime legitimacy" is not well-fitted for getting at these issues, for this vocabulary takes insufficient account of America as a "proposition country," a

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distinctive democratic experiment conceived as the working-out of a set of truth-claims. But disagreements over the vocabulary for accurately describing our circumstances ought not mask this fact: the *First Things* symposium raised questions that are unavoidable for the future of conservative politics.

Has the Supreme Court, in its increasingly bizarre attempts to justify its policy preferences in the matters of abortion and homosexuality, "established" by fiat a national creed incompatible with the religious and moral convictions of biblically formed Americans? Is that creed now being imposed on individual citizens and local communities by the federal regulatory apparatus and the educational bureaucracies of the federal and state governments? Does the fact of that establishment—does the content of that ersatz creed—attack the moral-cultural foundations of American democracy? Is America merely a republic of procedures—increasingly, procedures of litigation and judicial legislation—by which autonomous selves regulate their conflicts? Or is America a substantive moral experiment in a people's capacity for self-governance? These are "radical" questions, not in some debased 60's sense of "radicalism" but because they force us to think through, once again, the basic ("root," *radix*) truths to which the Founders pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor in creating this *Novus Ordo Seclorum* called the United States of America.

Speaking in Baltimore on October 8, 1995, Pope John Paul II suggested that Lincoln's question at Gettysburg—whether a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal could long endure—was a question for every generation of Americans. I think that is exactly right. To press that Lincolnian question into public debate today does not demean the many virtues of the American people, manifest in millions of individual lives and in what the legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon has called "communities of memory and mutual aid." Nor is it to hold the United States accountable to an abstract moral standard that no real-world polity could possibly achieve. Nor is it to declare oneself ready to engage in insurrection (which the editors of *First Things* have explicitly denied was their intention). It is, however, to acknowledge that there is nothing "given" about the success of American democracy, and that securing the future of democratic politics and free economics requires us to strengthen, steadily, the nation's moral-cultural foundations. Because democracy is not, and cannot be, an infinite series of pragmatic accommodations, made on vulgarized utilitarian grounds.

This is reminiscent of Burke's conservatism in his critique of Jacobinism and his defense of the small platoons and their essential social function. Those functions, when they are not being declared illegitimate by the Supreme Court, are increasingly usurped by a Court-driven federal government which imagines itself the defender of enlightened opinion against the unwashed masses and their stubborn adherence to traditional virtues and values. That kind of conservative critique of the functioning of our democracy, rooted as it is in an affirmation of the moral value of the American experiment, has about as much to do with Tom Hayden and Stokely Carmichael as it does with the public philosophy of Genghis Khan.

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Ruth R. Wisse

Only after the war is won do you begin to see how much was lost—the scorched landscape, the fatherless children. As long as the Soviet Union stood, one could imagine the bounty of freedom that would come with its collapse; the full extent and legacy of Communist devastation surfaced only after its defeat.

I think the same holds true for the conservatives who triumphed at the polls under the Republican banner in 1994. Not until Republicans assumed control of the House and Senate with the intention of curbing the welfare state, restoring family values, returning power to the people, did conservatives realize what America had really forfeited. Progressivism and liberalism have this advantage over conservatism in all its varieties—being directed toward the promise of the future, they do not keep track of what is sacrificed on the way. Being liberal means never having to say

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you're sorry. But conservatives with visions of a "re-moralized America" had to confront the scorched moral landscape and the fatherless children, and the prospect made some people desperate. The question posed by the *First Things* symposium—"The End of Democracy?"—seems to me a sign of desperation.

The desperation is fueled by the realization that in some spheres there is really not very much left for conservatives to conserve. I recall a letter to the editor in response to the November 1995 COMMENTARY symposium on "The National Prospect," expressing surprise that respondents had not addressed the women's movement. And since I was struck by the justice of this comment, let me begin with that issue.

Women's liberation, if not the most extreme then certainly the most influential neo-Marxist movement in America, has done to the American home what Communism did to the Russian economy, and much of the ruin is irreversible. By defining relations between men and women in terms of power and competition instead of reciprocity and cooperation, the movement tore apart the most basic and fragile contract in human society, the unit from which all other social institutions draw their strength.

Cooperation between men and women is enormously painful and difficult, depending as it does on the ability of unlike individuals to accept lifelong responsibility for one another and for the children that will issue from their union. Of the two sexes, women may stand to gain more from domestication and have more to fear from its erosion, which is why our culture—and Jewish culture, certainly—has tried so strenuously to define what husbands owe their wives. But like all revolutionaries, the ideologues of the women's movement did not calculate the value of what they wanted to destroy when they sought the liberation of their gender from the domestic "mystique." They may not be solely responsible for the collapse of the American family, the rise in domestic violence, the proliferation of undisciplined young men, and such related items as the decline in education, but none of these conditions can be improved unless and until women reinvest their energies in nurturing and sustaining families as their most cherished and vital preserve.

Given the still-powerful influence of women's liberation, how much can conservatives do to recover the family? Suppose the Republican Congress retroactively declared Dan Quayle the winner over Murphy Brown in the debate over single motherhood. No one can compensate the children who were conceived out of wedlock—most of them without the benefit of television-star salaries. Religious conservatives can, of course, try to persuade the young that monogamous unions between a man and a woman are the preferred basis of a healthful civilization, or that only by observing religious imperatives will they be able to withstand the seduction of libertinism and secular ideologies. Indeed, I know several young people who have studied and voluntarily assumed the discipline of Orthodox Judaism as the best means of achieving such a life. They have found a conservative way out of their private dilemma.

But when it comes to the larger political struggle, religion is enjoined by the Constitution from trying to impose its particular discipline on others, and the kind of personal persuasion needed to attract youngsters to religious practice is not readily communicated in the public domain. Conservatives cannot refer back to a tradition of values that no longer exists. Swamped by progressivist revolutions of the past three decades, conservatives find themselves, instead, proposing "solutions" in order to rescue the future, sounding for all the world like reformers and revolutionaries themselves.

OR CONSIDER another legacy of the 60's, the erosion of legislative authority by the judiciary and liberal elites. I offer an example from the university, the sphere with which I am most familiar. In 1969, Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted to withdraw all curricular and academic status from the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) of the various military services. The original basis for this was opposition to the war in Vietnam. But at the conclusion of the war, rather than reinstituting ROTC, the faculty redirected its indignation at a newer cause: "discrimination against homosexuals." On some other occasion it would be worth describing the stratagems invented by the Harvard faculty in order to express its contempt for the American government without sacrificing a cent of government funding either for itself or for its students. My subject here is the encroachment of the university upon the political realm.

ROTC is a feeder of the armed forces that are charged with the protection of all our freedoms and, increasingly, freedom around the world. The debate over those freedoms and how to protect them is part of the political process. Instead

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of joining that debate in the public arena, elite institutions (Harvard was hardly alone here) discovered ways of satisfying what they called their consciences without exerting themselves in political engagement. They invented a boutique politics in order to influence from above what would have been much more arduous and inconvenient to attempt to effect from below. A small group, by swinging the vote of a faculty that is more monolithic and more politically conformist than the American public, could claim that universities were henceforth to be considered, in the words of the Harvard statement, "an agent for changing what we think to be an antiquated and damaging public policy." Students, too, were encouraged by this example to skirt the democratic process, and to appoint themselves the moral superiors of their government. The politicization of the university, the demoralization of politics, were effected by one and the same process, and by upstanding people with otherwise stellar accomplishments whose moral hubris exceeded their democratic discipline.

The debate in *First Things* over the judiciary's usurpation of legislative powers deals with attempts to govern directly from above. Once a minority has learned to use nonelective institutions as agents of social change, why should its members return to the slower and clumsier procedures of electoral politics? Even if a more "conservative" spirit now prevails, liberal elites look to the media, the universities, and, above all, the judiciary to press their agenda, even as they decry a "crisis of confidence in government." This crisis of confidence was not created by politicians—who are no worse than they ever were—but by supererogatory procedures like the one I have described.

Religious Americans, even Christians who are in the majority, are prevented as a matter of state policy from imposing their beliefs on others. Yet if another minority has found a way of imposing *its* beliefs as state policy, how are people of genuine religious conscience to react? It now seems clear that those who worked so strenuously over the past few decades to remove religion from public life were not protecting the democratic process, as they claimed, so much as they were elevating their own convictions to the status of moral certainties: the pieties of the Left instead of religious piety; the self-righteousness of political reformers instead of God's righteous law; I own my body instead of God granted me life. When Father Richard John Neuhaus asks "whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime," I do not credit his question, much less agree with the implied answer. But he is right to feel that religion has been "had." The same holds true for the democratic process.

While I share with many conservatives a sense of great urgency, I think that confidence and dignity can only be restored to the family and to the government through cogent argument for self-discipline, by personal example, and through incremental political change. Even so, I worry much more, as a Jew, over the effects of women's lib and the shortcuts around democracy than I do about excesses of Christian zeal. I did not turn conservative because I was mugged by reality but because liberalism betrayed its principles when it yielded to leftist insurgencies and tactics. Those principles and the way of life they sustained, no conservative tide can restore, alas, until those who caused the damage take responsibility for what they did or until a new generation does it for them.

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Genesis and the Talking Heads

Hillel Halkin

It is when we think we are most original that we often most reflect the spirit of the times.

Twelve or thirteen years ago, in a period of my life when I had begun, after a long interval of rarely opening the Bible, to study the weekly Torah reading with its traditional commentaries every Saturday, I had what I took to be an illumination about the book of Genesis. It was, it came to me, a family novel. It was the greatest family novel ever written. And it was the saddest family novel ever written, for in this family everything went wrong; everything was ruined by too much love; everything was passed down to the next generation, the sins of the fathers visited upon the sons with fatal precision. Not even the happy ending of Joseph and his brothers, lavishly reunited in Egypt, could obscure the bitter truth of this book—which was that momentary lapses have eternal consequences and that momentary lapses are inevitable. Jacob, not Joseph, spoke for that truth when he said at the book's end:

> The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

It hit me with such force that I sat down and began writing a novel about Genesis myself. I wrote two chapters. The first took place in Ur of the Chaldees, when Abraham and Sarah fall in love. The second was set on the descent from Mount Moriah, after the aborted sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham walks by himself. He knows his son is hiding nearby, somewhere in the burnet and the rockrose. He strains to make out his footsteps but hears only the birds. Then I threw the two chapters away.

In the early 1980's Rabbi Burton Visotzky of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary, whose book *The Genesis of Ethics: How the Tormented Family of Genesis Leads Us to Moral Development*[1] appeared this past year, began a monthly "Genesis Seminar" that attracted to it, in the words of the television journalist Bill Moyers, "a score of people . . . among them a film critic, a screenwriter, a poet, an editor, an essayist and novelist, and a smattering of biblical scholars, Jewish and Christian." Hearing that the discussion at this seminar was "the best conversation in town," Moyers decided "to check it out"; discovered that Genesis was about "a dysfunctional family" whose stories "retain their hold on us" because they "ring so true about human nature"; and came away "resolved then and there to test whether the communal reading of these stories

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[1] Crown, 211 pp., $20.00.

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could happen on television." The ultimate result was a ten-part series, *Genesis: A Living Conversation*, which played to a large audience on PBS last autumn and has now been published as a book.[2]

And since twelve or thirteen years is not an overly long span for a literary pregnancy, one can assume that at least some of the other books treating Genesis as a family saga that have recently hit the market with remarkable simultaneity were conceived at about the same time. Some, by their authors' testimony, were inspired by weekly Torah study too, and some of these authors participated in the Moyers program. Something, it would seem, was in the air.

What?

WELL, TORAH study groups for one thing. Jews have always gone over the weekly reading in the privacy of their homes, but doing so in informal discussion groups came into fashion in America in the late 1960's and 70's, concomitantly with the *havurah* or "fellowship" movement. Many of these groups were composed of adults raising children, often in the process of rediscovering their "Jewish roots"—and when adults raising children sit around and talk, what do they talk about but adults raising children? Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Ishmael, Hagar, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Joseph and his brothers gave them plenty to talk about.

It may be, though, that Genesis could not have been talked about in this way had the ground not been prepared by a growing number of books and articles, many written by scholars coming from the field of literature, in which biblical texts were treated as literary ones.

Although, starting with the 1970's, the change brought about in perceptions of the Bible by writers like Northrop Frye, Edwin Good, Frank Kermode, Michael Fishbane, Meir Sternberg, and Robert Alter was initially confined to the scholarly community, it had a broad trickle-down effect. After nearly a century in which the widespread loss of religious faith had removed Scripture as a living book from the hands of most cultured readers, leaving it in the possession of church- and synagogue-goers on the one hand and the Higher Critics on the other, the new literary approach restored it to general accessibility. Suddenly, a generation of sophisticated college graduates came to realize that a text like Genesis did not have to be approached as either the Word of God or a problem in Semitic philology. It could be read as an artful story by the same methods, and with as much profit, as *The Odyssey* or *Hamlet*—and, with the thirst of long deprivation, so it was.

And the family! Has any age talked and worried about it more than our own? In part this is because no other age has seen it fall apart like our own; in part because no other has expected more from it. Never before have families been smaller and have parents invested so much time and emotion in their children; never before have they felt so bitterly cheated by the results; never before have children been so angrily bewildered by what was wanted from them.

And God! Many of us do not exactly believe in Him, but we are not prepared to let go of Him, either, not even when we call Him "her" or "it." He lives on in us as a kind of fictional character with whom our imaginations remain intensely engaged. *A fictional character?* But suppose that is what He is in the Bible, too!

The stage is set for *Genesis: A Living Conversation.*

BEAUTIFULLY PRODUCED, with delicate accompanying music and art work, each installment of the PBS series consists of an hour-long panel discussion on a different chapter of Genesis. Each panel has seven members, among whom only Burton Visotzky is a constant presence.

The other 37 participants switch on and off. Among them are Robert Alter, author of a recently published new translation of and commentary on Genesis[3]; Azizah al-Hibri, a Muslim feminist who teaches at the University of Richmond; Rabbi Norman Cohen, professor of midrash at the Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) and author of *Self, Struggle, and Change: The Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and Their Healing Insights for Our Lives*[4]; Francisco García-Treto, chairman of the department of religion at Trinity University; novelist Mary Gordon; P.K. McCary, author of *Black Bible Chronicles: From Genesis to the Promised Land* (1993); Indian novelist Bharati Mukherjee; Muslim theologian Seyyed Hossein Nasr; African-American social worker and pastor Eugene Rivers; psychotherapist Naomi Rosenblatt, co-author (with Joshua Horwitz) of *Wrestling With Angels: What the First Family of Genesis Teaches Us About Our Spiritual Identity, Sexuality, and Personal Relationships*[5]; Phyllis Trible, professor of sacred literature at Union Theological

[2] Doubleday, 361 pp., $29.95.

[3] Norton, 324 pp., $25.00.

[4] Jewish Lights, 209 pp., $21.95.

[5] Delacorte Press, 388 pp., $22.95.

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Seminary and author of *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (1984); Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, author of *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*[6]; Karen Armstrong, author of *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis*[7]; and Stephen Mitchell, author of another new translation of Genesis.[8]

An ecumenically representative and carefully gender-balanced group, including not a few ordained ministers and rabbis and/or teachers of theology. And yet Genesis proves to be a troublesome book for many of them—sexist, racist, and incompatible with contemporary norms.

The story of Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar, for example. Burton Visotzky finds it "horrifying" because Abraham is "put into a different moral category, which lets him get away with things that don't belong in everyday morality," and because Sarah "physically abuses" Hagar. Elizabeth Swados, who wrote the music for the series, thinks Sarah "a victim" who is "the second-class citizen in the relationship," yet whose behavior toward Hagar and Ishmael "shows the beginning of class and cultural identity and false pride—in a sense, racism." Bharati Mukherjee feels that in this story "there's a kind of justification for the oppression of the rest of us." Lewis Smedes, professor emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary, agrees: "It was wrong and dumb to have Hagar sleep with Abraham and have a son and have them all live in the same house. Sarah was obtuse and unimaginative . . . using Hagar and Ishmael for nationalistic or family purposes." Abraham was "a very wimpish patriarch."

THE BINDING of Isaac, discussed in an episode entitled "The Trial," poses even more of a problem:

> *Norman Cohen*: As I read the account, it seems to me that the voice Abraham hears commanding him to sacrifice his own son is perhaps Abraham's own voice. It's Abraham's ego that needs to prove his fidelity and his faith to himself and the world. . . . How can that possibly be what God wants?
>
> *Phyllis Trible*: No, this story is terrifying precisely because it is God Who sets up the test. . . . My understanding is that the story has to do with idolatry—the idolatry of the son. Once God has given the gift of Isaac to Abraham, does Abraham focus on Isaac and forget the giver? Abraham is so attached to this child that the issue of idolatry becomes acute for God.
>
> *P.K. McCary*: When I look at Abraham, I see a man . . . so detached from emotional involvement in other people's feelings that he seems self-centered. . . . It's as if the intimate relationships he has aren't as important as the people in the rest of the world.
>
> *Francisco García-Treto*: When we get to the point where we feel that God is calling us to give somebody else's life up, we're in bad trouble. There's no such thing as a theological suspension of the ethical [*sic*: the actual phrase, from Kierkegaard, is "a teleological suspension of the ethical"]. This is at the root of the worst things that religions have done. . . . Don't you think that if God said, "Sacrifice your son" to a mother, the mother would say, "Get lost!"? I think that's what Sarah would have said.
>
> *Bill Moyers*: And many people who claim to hear a call from God sacrifice their families to their sense of mission.
>
> *Burton Visotzky*: When I read this story, . . . I'm not sure I want to be involved with a God Who makes these kinds of demands on me. . . . If faith is being tested here, it's a kind of faith I don't want to subscribe to. I prefer to think that God demands a faith that calls for the intellect to be engaged rather than one that just says, "Yes, sir."

To be sure, Abraham has his defenders. Picking up on P.K. McCary's remark, Sayyed Hossein Nasr says:

> I don't think detachment is necessarily identified with selfishness. . . . God is the sacred, and the sacred has the right to ask of us all that we are. This is something that modern people have forgotten. . . . Isaac . . . is really our carnal, passionate soul, that must be sacrificed before the altar of divine reality. . . .

And Eugene Rivers adds:

> We're viewing this story through a 20th-century lens and then superimposing our context on a very complex historical, cultural, and political context that we don't fully appreciate. . . . Abraham's moral ambiguity is an argument for the position that you don't have to be a goody-goody to function as an instrument of God. . . . I resonate with Abraham, and I identify with his frailty and humanity.

[6] Jewish Publication Society, 456 pp., $34.95.

[7] McKay, 195 pp., $20.00.

[8] HarperCollins, 161 pp., $20.00.

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Rivers, too, however, illustrates how such "superimposition," unavoidable in the reading of any text, is especially unavoidable in a modern reading of the Bible, whose prose, with its often-remarked-on radical minimalism, demands a filling-in of the many "blank spaces" between verse and verse, or even between word and word. For if one is not going to rely on traditional Jewish commentaries (and of all the panel members, only Avivah Zornberg makes a consistent point of doing so), one must create biblical commentary of one's own. In discussing, for example, Abraham's lie to Pharaoh that Sarah (who is consequently taken to Pharaoh's harem) is his sister and not his wife—an act witheringly criticized by most of the panel members—Rivers declares:

> Listen, I can imagine lying. I can see that. Here's a black dude in the inner city. He's got a white wife. A couple of Egyptian brothers roll up on the brother with the white wife. Now this guy's not a complete fool. "Yo, baby, we work together. Right? Pretend you're my boss. You're not my wife, right, because if you're my wife, you may be a widow by the end of this evening."

Other panel members, like Rivers, frequently cite their own experience in trying to understand that of a biblical character. Even when they do not, we often sense it in the background; sometimes, outside confirmation is available. Thus, in his *Self, Struggle, and Change*, Norman Cohen speaks of the binding of Isaac in greater detail:

> We are all like Abraham; each of us is so involved in our outside worlds—our careers, interests, or our principles—that we do not or cannot see that it is our child, or spouse or parent that is bound on the altar. . . . For when Isaac calls out to Abraham . . . it is my son who is speaking to me and saying, "I know that you're busy, dad, but do you have some time to watch the basketball game with me tonight?" and it is so easy to blurt out "Ilan, I'm tired. Some other time." At those very moments, would that we would have the strength to respond *hineini* ["here I am," Abraham's response to Isaac] in the fullness of its meaning; would that I could say more often, "Sure, Ilan, nothing could give me more pleasure!"

IT WAS at this point that I went in search of a remembered passage from Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843), which also deals with the binding-of-Isaac story, may well be the most extraordinary commentary ever written on a single episode in the Bible. And it is also the first truly "modern" biblical commentary in the sense I have spoken of, for in writing it Kierkegaard deliberately used an incident from his own life—his breaking-off of an engagement to a young woman he loved because of his decision that marriage was incompatible with his religious vocation—as the key to understanding Abraham's readiness to offer up his son to God. In the text of *Fear and Trembling* this incident is disguised, but in Kierkegaard's journals it and its relation to the book are discussed at length.

How can we "superimpose," to use Eugene Rivers's word, our private experience on the Bible without the Bible's being trivialized? Kierkegaard was troubled by this question too. The passage from *Fear and Trembling* that I was looking for reads:

> I require of every man that he should not think so inhumanly of himself as not to dare to enter those palaces where not merely the memory of the elect abides but where the elect themselves abide. He should not press forward impudently and impute to them kinship with himself; on the contrary, he should be blissful every time he bows before them, but he should be frank and confident and always be something more than a charwoman, for if he will not be more, he will never gain entrance. And what will help him is precisely the dread and distress by which the great are tried, for otherwise, if he has a bit of pith in him, they will merely arouse his justified envy.

Would that these words had been inscribed above the entrance to the PBS studio! For by "the palaces where the elect abide," as opposed to those inhabited only by the "memory" of the elect, Kierkegaard means the books of the Bible as opposed to the traditional commentaries upon them; and what he is urging us to do is to read these books in a dual frame of mind that is difficult to maintain.

On the one hand, Kierkegaard says, we should be "frank" and "confident" with them, by which he means that we should not conceal our private experience from the biblical text, but should rather admit it into our reading and make use of it there without false or self-demeaning modesty, as one admits valid evidence into the proceedings of a trial. Precisely to the extent that the Bible is an eternal document, we are its contemporary witnesses, a role for which we disqualify ourselves when we discount the testimony of our own lives.

But, on the other hand, Kierkegaard warns us,

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we should not be "impudent" and "impute kinship" between us and the biblical heroes; if we do, we shall lose sight of their greatness and degrade them to our level of understanding rather than struggle to rise to theirs. And the best way to guard against this is to keep in mind their "dread and distress." If we fail to do this—if we allow ourselves to think that they acted easily or mindlessly, or without inward reflection of a more intense and anguished manner than is customarily our own—we shall be led to assume that we too, in similar circumstances, could have done as well as or better than they did, a conclusion that can only make us resentful of the homage paid them and itching to take them down a peg.

This is excellent advice, and if it had been followed by Norman Cohen and Burton Visotzky, the former would never have compared Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac with a father's refusal to watch a basketball game with his son, nor would the latter have written in *The Genesis of Ethics* that "One can almost see the flat affect of the depressive as [Abraham] walks, zombielike up the mountain" of Moriah. "I know," writes Visotsky in the same passage,

> that every parent has a moment or two, particularly with teenagers, when the thought "I'll kill them" has flitted through his or her mind. But it is a long way—three days' distance—from an angry or frustrated passing thought to the assumption that this murder is a divinely commanded sacrifice.

Three days is indeed a long while for a man to be walking with the son he loves and has gambled his entire life on to the place where he will slay him, which is why the Bible specifies the time it took. And if one would grant this man, for every second of those days, the dread and distress that Visotzky and Cohen deny him by turning him into a psychopathic or (what is in a sense even worse) grumpily inattentive father, one would be safeguarded from their particular kind of impudence.

"This is the amazing thing about the people of Genesis," says Bill Moyers. "The more we talk about them, the more they look like people we know—faces in the mirror." What is truly amazing is the thought that we might want to read a book that has inspired countless millions of people for thousands of years in such a way. The people we know are all around us; if we are merely going to find them again in the Bible, why bother reading the Bible at all?

"For its healing insights," answers Norman Cohen. But Cohen's insights are not extracted from the biblical text; they are the shibboleths of our age, read into it so that he can pretend to take them out again like the coins a magician pulls from a spectator's ear. Or, to alter the metaphor, they are the postcards sent by the tourist who has journeyed to a foreign land and, summing up his impressions, now writes to the folks back home, "They have everything here that we do!"

WHY, FOR that matter, read great literature of any kind (if great literature is what the Bible is), if instead of extending our horizons it simply confirms the ones we are familiar with?

The problem is not just with reading the Bible. It is not even just with reading great literature. For great literature tends to be about heroes, which is to say, about people fundamentally different from ourselves—and if there is anything our conventional contemporary piety cannot tolerate it is the idea of fundamental difference. Behind the paternoster of anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ageist, anti-abusist, anti-victimist-of-any-kind rhetoric—even, or paradoxically most of all, behind the rhetoric of multiculturalism—lies a leveling will, more sweeping than that of the most egalitarian economics. Marxism, after all, seeks only to abolish outer distinctions, whereas the piety of our age passes over these to aim straight at inner ones.

"What really matters is not whether Abraham is good or bad or cowardly or heroic, but that God pursues His design for the welfare of the human family with . . . people like us." "When we come to this story . . . I have this sinking feeling that it's . . . about the mixed family so many of us experience now—first wife, second wife, surrogate parenthood, children, conflict." "I still want to know: What's the deal? What do I get in this covenant?" "Abraham, in a sense, is the prototypical American. He's got hustle. . . . We have only Abraham's word that the Lord appeared [to him]. . . . It's like a guy saying, 'Look, I need to inspire my followers to take this arduous journey, so I'd better make God come on. I'd better bring on the voices, bring on the vision.'"

And indeed, how could God be so unfair, let alone elitist, as to talk to Abraham when He does not talk to us? These are what Nietzsche called the voices of democratic *ressentiment*—with a vengeance.

But they are not, happily, the only voices on Moyers's program. (In fairness, they are not even always the voices of the voices I have quoted.) There are others, many of them wise and insight-

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ful. There are the two Muslim panelists, who of all the panel members are the most religiously traditional in their thought and, ironically, those closest in many respects to what might be called a normative rabbinical point of view. There are more conservatively-minded Jewish panelists like Leon Kass, who reminds us that the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs were playing for the stakes of handing on a "divine lineage," which are higher than those of personal relationships; and like Avivah Zornberg, who time and again brings the discussion back to the realities of the Hebrew text from which it keeps escaping. There are black panelists like Renita Weems and Eugene Rivers, who—clearly irked by some of his colleagues—remarks at one point:

> The Scriptures function as an emancipatory mechanism to resurrect faith and hope so that a person can transcend the whining, can transcend the limousine liberalism where you're just whining about your rights. . . . See, the funny thing about this is that most poor people don't need any of our liberal clichés about the unfairness of it all because they know that infinitely better than we do. So much of what salon intellectuals do in the academy, where we go through a kind of hand-wringing routine about the injustice of life, really has no bearing out there in the streets. This is why the Scriptures are so important for people. . . .

And there is the British-American artist Hugh O'Donnell, who did the graphics for *Genesis: A Living Conversation*. O'Donnell participates in the first and next-to-last panel, which is called "God Wrestling" and deals with Jacob's struggle with the angel on the eve of meeting his brother Esau for the first time in twenty years—the same Esau whom he last saw on the day he cheated him of his father Isaac's blessing. It is hard to say what this discussion would have been like without O'Donnell; with him, it soars with the excitement of minds rising on each other's updrifts. It makes me wish I could have been there.

"God Wrestling" begins, like many preceding installments, with a panelist—in this case, the liberal Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann—criticizing the moral standards of a biblical hero. Jacob, says Brueggemann, is "duplicitous" to the end. "Even after this last, wonderful vision" of the angel, "the very last thing Jacob does is lie to his brother. He says 'I'll meet you' [at Esau's home in Seir] and then he goes the other way."

> *Avivah Zornberg*: But Jacob doesn't actually believe in Esau's peacemaking.
>
> *Burton Visotzky*: I'm with Walter on this. . . . Nothing about Jacob changes. In a way, that's what's so depressing.
>
> *Bill Moyers*: When we meet [Jacob], he is a thief, a coward, and a fugitive. He has stolen a birthright and is running for his life from his brother because he's afraid of his brother.

Here O'Donnell intervenes for the first time. "Jacob," he says, abruptly flinging the conversation off its familiar feet, "is pure genius. He's human genius." "How so?" asks a perceptibly startled Moyers.

> *Hugh O'Donnell*: Jacob is a real hero in this story because he's cursed with a kind of active monkey brain and incredible invention and intellect. It keeps him awake.
>
> He can't get any rest or any peace. He's sent running through the world, and God comes down and gives him help. . . . He actually shows him the pathway to heaven [in the vision of Jacob's ladder]. He shows him the structure of how to do it because the man has the intellect and equipment to do something about it.
>
> *Bill Moyers*: What does this tell you about God? Here's this young man who's stolen his family birthright, abused his brother, and he's on the run, afraid for his life.
>
> *Hugh O'Donnell*: He's a typical second-born son, right? He's emerged with this equipment, and he's got this wild brother, and he knows, through the support of his mother, that he really is the one who has to save God's vision and the covenant.

And now, despite Visotzky and Moyers's repeated attempts to drag it back down to the well-trodden ground of Jacob's ethical incorrectness, the conversation begins to take off. First O'Donnell gives it another push by remarking, "Morality isn't a question of life. Life is voracious, and you have to make really, really clever decisions on what is going to grow and what is not." Renita Weems then agrees that "There's nothing like being confronted with reality. . . . When you've had some kind of experience where you know that God is accessible, then heaven is accessible," and tells a story about how, when she

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was once despairingly contemplating suicide, "All of a sudden something lifted. I knew that it was God and that God was speaking to me." Roberta Hestenes also relates a religious experience and says, "And one of the things in the Jacob story that touches me is that this [kind of experience] is so unexpected." Renita Weems adds:

> We asked earlier: Why doesn't God judge Jacob and punish him or chastise him in some way? But sometimes an experience [like Jacob's wresting a blessing from the angel, who then lames him] is enough to prostrate you. Sometimes the worst thing that God can do is show up and do something merciful to you.
>
> *Hugh O'Donnell*: And sometimes when you get these wonderful gifts, it just ups the ante. God has given you a bit more, and so you have more to do.
>
> *Walter Brueggemann*: The story isn't about morality. . . . It's about grace—the unexpected and unearned. . . .
>
> *Hugh O'Donnell*: And it's angels every time, isn't it? We're talking about agency. Whenever heaven's gates open, it's because of an agency, which is not the person you think is driving. It's something like a lodger that lives inside you and takes over, thank God.

Soon after, O'Donnell speaks of having once had to wrestle with his own father as Jacob did with the angel. "Physically?" asks Bill Moyers. And the answer is:

> Yes, physically. I had to overpower him because until then he had overpowered me. . . . There were no two ways about it—it had to be done. . . . This was drawing blood. But when this occurred, he immediately arrived at a state in which he could say, "You are free—and free with my blessing."
>
> *Avivah Zornberg*: Isn't it very poignant with Jacob, then?
>
> *Hugh O'Donnell*: I think it's extremely poignant. . . . Jacob doesn't know how to reconcile himself with what he's done because he's done something that is greater than his awareness of himself. He has moved into his destiny. This need shapes his vision of moving into God as the next father.

The conversation continues to gather intensity, moving from the lives of the participants to the story in Genesis and back again, one *aperçu* following another, until Renita Weems says near the end of it:

> There's something about reading with others and hearing other experiences that make this story just so precious. . . . [I]n this conversation there were times when we were all locked into "What does it say?" Then there were other times when we were a little freer, playing with what it says and how we experience what it says and what it does not say.

To which Hugh O'Donnell responds:

> And that ladder is Jacob, seeing himself stretch all the way to heaven. He's that large.

WHAT THESE panelists have done is the opposite of what their colleagues did in discussing Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah. There, to adopt Kierkegaard's language, one had an impudent pressing-forth, a reduction of the Bible's heroes to the size of the participants; here one has a blissful bowing-down, a subordination of the participants to the aspect of a biblical hero. The two procedures may depend on a similar use of analogy, but the difference between them is precisely the difference between descending and ascending a ladder.

And an interesting phenomenon emerges here. These discussions, I have said, were made possible by a "literarization" of the Bible, without which a book like Genesis could not have been talked about with the freedom Renita Weems speaks of. And I have also said that if the human characters of Genesis were to be regarded as fictional, it would be only consistent to regard the God of Genesis in the same way.

But here something happens. Although no member of Bill Moyers's panels has ever met Sarah or Jacob, some of the panelists do feel that, in a mysterious manner they cannot explain, they have met God. And when they express this feeling, the movement of their reading begins to ripple back in the other direction. For if the God of Genesis is real, it is only consistent to regard the characters of Genesis in the same way—and so, with a sudden shifting of the tide, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Ishmael, Hagar, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Joseph and his brothers become intensely real too, realer than the characters in any other work of literature, realer than Odysseus or Hamlet.

The Bible as a family novel? Up to a point. Up to a point.

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Republicans for Quotas

Richard E. Morgan

On election day this past November, California voters rejected Bob Dole's presidential candidacy by a margin of 51 to 38 percent. On that same day, by 54 to 46 percent, they approved Proposition 209 on the state ballot: the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) proscribing the use of racial, ethnic, or gender preferences in the activities of state government. Neither Dole nor the leadership of the Republican party in California had made any effort to campaign for the initiative until the last few days before the election—by which time, thanks to an elaborate and thoroughly mendacious left-wing media blitz, the public's support for CCRI had declined by fifteen percentage points from its previous overwhelming majority. Having run away from the issue for months, Dole turned to it again only as part of a desperate grab for California's 54 electoral votes at a moment when all other avenues to the White House appeared blocked.

A year and a half earlier, things had looked very different. In the wake of the Republican revolution of 1994, it seemed to many that our nationwide system of racial and ethnic preferences, which goes under the name of affirmative action, was finally about to be swept away. As Senate majority leader, Dole himself appeared to want to help wield the broom. In February 1995, he announced on *Meet the Press* that he had instructed the Congressional Research Service to compile a list of all federal programs containing racial preferences, and was considering how to abolish them. The following month, he promised to introduce legislation ending special treatment of "favored" groups. "After nearly 30 years of government sanctions, quotas, timetables, set-asides, and other racial preferences," Dole declared, "the American people sense all too clearly that the race-counting game has gone too far."

Dole was as good as his word. Along with Representative Charles T. Canady of Florida, he introduced the Equal Opportunity Act of 1995, prohibiting the federal government from granting any preference on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin in connection with any federal contract, job, or promotion. By early 1996, as the Republican primary season advanced, Dole traveled to California where he let it be known that the issue would be a central element of his political strategy there. "I can support the CCRI," Dole proclaimed; President Clinton, he added, could not.

But almost as soon as the Republican presidential nomination was in his grasp, the tenor of Dole's remarks changed, and statements emanating from his campaign organization began to suggest that the frontal attack on preferences had been put on hold. Days after his resignation from the Senate in July, the Equal Opportunity Act was

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unceremoniously withdrawn by the Republican leadership. Soon, Dole was paying court to a potential vice-presidential nominee, retired General Colin Powell, who had made a point of publicly expressing his opposition to CCRI.

By the time of the Republican convention in San Diego in August, Dole and his strategists had said nothing about the issue for months; supporters of CCRI were rebuffed in their attempt to secure a place on the roster of convention speakers for Ward Connerly, the black California entrepreneur who was heading the drive for Proposition 209. Only in the final countdown to November 5 did Dole again speak out, and then his motives were utterly undisguised: in informal remarks to reporters after delivering a short speech attacking racial quotas, all he had to say was "wedge issues, wedge issues, we're talking wedge issues here."

We will never know whether Dole's cynical deathbed conversion pulled him up in California or pulled Proposition 209 down. What is plain, however, is that his performance was but another chapter in a history of Republican confusion, cowardice, and retreat with respect to racial preferences that dates back almost three decades.

ALTHOUGH AFFIRMATIVE action has its roots in the Johnson years, it was the Nixon administration which, starting in the late 1960's, unleashed the civil-rights bureaucracy to pursue race-conscious policies and programs in a large-scale way. The requirement that employers establish written affirmative-action plans is one of Nixon's legacies, as is the ubiquitous use of "goals and timetables"—a bureaucratic euphemism for quotas—to measure progress against such plans. Nixon also was responsible for the "Philadelphia Plan," the first open racial quota system for selecting federal contractors.

Why Nixon moved so vigorously in this direction is, like much else about the man, something of an enigma. Perhaps his bad-guy image and his preoccupation with foreign policy made him eager to seek ways to immunize himself against criticism from the Left. If affirmative-action programs had the additional political benefit of splitting Democratic-party ranks—pitting white trade unionists against black civil-rights activists—that was a supplementary dividend. Nor can it be forgotten that Nixon, essentially a political moderate, genuinely sought to find ways to ease the passage of poor blacks into the American middle class, and may have fastened on the expedient of "goals and timetables" out of well-intentioned if fatally misguided motives.

Ronald Reagan, the next Republican to occupy the White House, was a completely different case. Reagan had campaigned on principle against racial quotas, which by the time he took office in 1981 had become deeply entrenched in a broad range of federal programs. Early in his first term, it seemed that he might act to abolish many of these programs with the stroke of a pen, by means of an executive order. But, although a review of civil-rights policies was indeed initiated, Reagan's first Attorney General, William French Smith, had other priorities; the idea of an executive order was permitted to languish.

In Reagan's second term, Edwin Meese, the new Attorney General, once again attempted to abolish preferences. A new executive order covering federal contracting was duly prepared and submitted for interdepartmental review. But this led to a swift and ferocious reaction from the civil-rights establishment, and as the drum roll of criticism intensified, doubting voices were heard within the administration's ranks. Vice President Bush, already looking ahead to his presidential prospects in 1988, was among those urging caution, as was Elizabeth Dole, Reagan's Secretary of Transportation. In the end, Reagan decided not to proceed, and the White House announced that the new executive order would be delayed indefinitely.

Not surprisingly, George Bush said little about racial preferences and attempted to do even less over the course of his four years. One event, a 1989 Supreme Court decision, came close to forcing his hand. In *Wards Cove Packing Company Inc.* v. *Atonio*, the Court severely restricted the ability of groups claiming discrimination to invoke mere statistical underrepresentation in the workforce. A vigorous assault on the decision was duly mounted from the Left, and legislation was introduced in Congress to overturn it. Bush's initial reaction was to oppose this legislation, which he properly denounced as a "quota bill." But as his poll numbers faded along with the glow of Desert Storm, and as the 1992 election loomed, he began to wobble. In the end, Bush signed a compromise bill containing the very provisions he had previously attacked.

WHAT ACCOUNTS for the fecklessness of Republican political leaders on an issue which, if polling data are to be believed, is a natural vote-getter for them? After all, the National Election Study's biennial survey of Americans

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from 1986 to 1994 shows approximately 80 percent consistently opposing racial preferences.

One factor may have to do with the way in which the Republican party raises its money. Among the country-club and Range Rover Republicans who contribute to the party and its candidates, being a "fiscal conservative" but a "social moderate" is the norm. Campaign donations from these quarters are frequently accompanied by notes instructing candidates to stay "on message": shorthand for reducing taxes and regulations while steering clear of divisive social issues.

Even more significant than the pattern of individual giving, however, is the attitude of corporate America—the source of the lion's share of Republican party funds. As is well-known by now, and as the recent fiasco at Texaco only serves to underscore, big business has long made its peace with racial and gender preferences. Indeed, large business enterprises not only hire and promote by quota, they have invested substantially in the entire regime that surrounds them: rare is the major corporation, Texaco very much included, that is without a "diversity" program and its attendant personnel. Having made such programs part of their culture, corporations are utterly uninterested in a potentially disruptive change.

Another and more intangible factor may also be at work: residual Republican guilt. There is no denying that many Republicans were late and tentative in supporting the civil-rights movement of the 1960's which helped bring an end to legalized segregation in the South. The stain from that tardiness seems to inhibit many of them, even today, from speaking out frankly on issues connected with race. Republicans, in fact, appear to suffer from an incapacitating disease—a rhetoric deficit—which, as David Gelernter has observed in another connection, inhibits them from addressing "moral problems in moral terms." Why this rhetoric deficit has persisted for so long is, in the end, difficult to say, although the abandon with which the epithet "racist" is hurled at anyone who has the temerity to oppose reverse discrimination surely plays a part.

The irony is that, for Republicans, the social chaos and racial animosity produced by preferences offer an opportunity to match principle to good politics. Opposition to racial preferences is popular. Republican politicians who needlessly assume a defensive crouch on this issue pay a price: it happened to George Bush and it happened again, even more dramatically, to Bob Dole. But opposition to racial preferences is also just. *And* it is the very essence of the civil-rights revolution of the 1960's, captured in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Twice before in our history, Americans have had the chance to commit themselves to color-blindness as the cardinal rule of race relations. The first time was during Reconstruction. In framing the Fourteenth Amendment, however, the 39th Congress could not bring itself to close the door on all race-conscious policy-making by the states, and the result was Jim Crow. The second time was in the decade encompassing the *Brown* decision and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Then, a consensus on color-blindness almost coalesced, only to be undercut in the late 1960's by growing elite enthusiasm for goals and quotas; the result was our present racial spoils system, in which children, and adults too, are judged solely by the color of their skin.

The adoption of Proposition 209 by the state of California has given us a third chance. It is no wonder that a federal judge, a Carter-administration appointee, is trying to prevent CCRI from being implemented, or that the Clinton administration has thrown its weight behind this effort; that is no more than is to be expected. But if we end up missing or destroying this last opportunity, part of the responsibility will ineluctably lie as well with leaders of the Republican party who have weaved, dodged, and, what is worse, contrived to lend their tacit support and encouragement to the immoral and socially explosive practice of dividing our citizenry by race.

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OBSERVATIONS

Reading Closely Again

Christopher Clausen

IT MAY be hard to remember now, but a set of practices called the New Criticism was once the reigning orthodoxy in departments of literature in American universities. During the decades since its zenith in the 1950's, the New Criticism has become the academic equivalent of Ozzie and Harriet, reviled by approved opinion as a symbol of all the things that were supposedly wrong with American life in those benighted years. In particular, the New Critics' pseudo-religious devotion to literary art, in a world where so many social grievances awaited redress, is said to have lent complicit support to the existing structures of American racism, sexism, elitism, ethnocentrism, and all the rest.

Who exactly were the New Critics? In his book *The New Criticism* (1941), which gave the movement its name, the poet John Crowe Ransom dealt with such influential figures as T.S. Eliot (in his critical writings) and William Empson in England and, in the United States, I.A. Richards (at Harvard) and Yvor Winters (at Stanford). But for most Americans familiar with the movement in its later years, the principal names are those of Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, and a fluctuating roster of others who often had little in common with one another.

The most prominent New Critics—Brooks, Warren, Tate, and Ransom himself—were Southerners, and at an earlier stage of their careers several of them had belonged to the group that produced the anti-industrialist manifesto of "Southern agrarianism," *I'll Take My Stand* (1930); when the movement came under sustained attack in the civil-rights atmosphere of the 1960's, these facts were much invoked in its disfavor. To make matters more confusing, Brooks, the most influential New Critic and the subject of an excellent new critical biography by Mark Royden Winchell,* spent the last twenty years of his life (he died in 1994) denying that there had ever been any such thing as the New Criticism.

As an academic movement, the New Criticism began in the 1930's with the idea that a reader could understand a literary work best by reading it carefully. The idea, seemingly innocuous, was in fact anything but. When the New Critics emphasized, to the point of cliché, the importance of reading a poem "as a poem," they meant that it ought *not* be read as other things: as, for example, a direct reflection of its author's life; or an embodiment of the culture of its moment; or a philosophical statement; or a political manifesto. In this sense, the New Criticism represented a genuinely revolutionary impulse, fighting simultaneously against the then-entrenched assumptions of literary historicism and the first wave of academic Marxism.

Historicism, which presupposes the relativity of any literary work to the time and place in which it was written, was a commonplace in universities in the 1930's and 1940's (and is again a commonplace today). For the New Critics, it was bad the-

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* *Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism.* University Press of Virginia, 510 pp., $34.95.

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ory and bad practice rolled into one. "I have been anxious to see," Brooks announced at the beginning of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), the most important handbook of New Critical practice, "what residuum, if any, is left after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix."

Similarly with message-hunting, whether philosophical or political. Inexperienced or careless readers have always tended to equate poems with their messages. These are usually moral ones—Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," for example, means you should be decisive in pursuing your goals. But to the New Critics, this way of reading not only reduced a complex work to a banal statement of the obvious but also, much more crucially, ignored the ambiguities, ironies, and "tensions" that served to qualify or even to undercut the apparent "message" of any good poem. "It is never what a poem *says* that matters," I.A. Richards pronounced, "but what it *is*." And Brooks, after half-heartedly attempting to paraphrase a 17th-century lyric, remarked:

> It is not that the poem communicates nothing. Precisely the contrary. The poem communicates so much and communicates it so richly and with such delicate qualifications that the thing communicated is mauled and distorted if we attempt to convey it by any vehicle less subtle than that of the poem itself.

The worst sort of message-hunting, however, was not the philosophical, which at least dignified the writer as a moral teacher worthy of respect, but the political and ideological. When literary works were interpreted as political statements, aesthetic standards flew out the window. What remained as a criterion of judgment was the most parochial touchstone of all: does the author agree or disagree with my own views?

Anyone who inhabits a university today has seen the consequences of this kind of radical reductivism: Shakespeare denounced as a symbol of oppression, Jane Austen as a collaborator with male dominance, Joseph Conrad as a racist and imperialist. Conversely, writers with no claim to admiration on grounds of literary merit are celebrated for their (real or presumed) politics. The New Critics' original adversaries on this point were Marxists, with their contempt for "aestheticism" and their taste for proletarian literature; today, the intellectual progeny of these Marxists has a lock on many a department of literature.

IN ADDITION to cultural historicists, amateur moralists, and political zealots, the New Critics also had a different and larger threat in mind when they undertook simultaneously to protect and to elevate the art of close reading. Looming in the background was science, which had vastly risen in prestige and vastly reduced the relative status of literature in society, not to mention in the university. By denying that literary works embodied forms of knowledge which could be detached and scrutinized apart from the objects in which they were "conveyed," the New Critics effectively removed literature from a competition with science which it could not win.

On the simplest level, science might make a poem or a novel "dated," in the same way a pre-Einsteinian work of physics is dated. If this seems far-fetched, one need think only of the most popular poem of the Victorian age: Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Here was a work about death whose entire structure of consolation depended on a pre-Darwinian view of evolution that no well-informed person could accept in the 20th century. The New Critics' way around this was simply to deny the relevance of scientific progress to literature.

On another level, though, the extreme formalism of the New Critics can also be seen as something else: a rejection of the fuzziness associated with the humanistic disciplines and an effort to place the interpretation of literature on as rigorous a mental basis as that required for the scientific interpretation of material reality. In this sense, even as they were removing literature from competition with science, the New Critics were simultaneously asserting its claim as an intellectual rival.

Be that as it may, however, there was a price to be paid for the New Critics' formalism. Maybe poems could be shielded from scientific criticism by claiming they inhabited an autonomous realm where paraphrasable ideas never appeared; but the result was to make literature seem not more but less relevant to human life. It cannot be accidental that the New Critics disliked most 19th-century poetry, precisely because it so often expressed ideas and emotions straightforwardly, preferring instead the "tension"-laden works of the 17th-century metaphysical poets or the irony- and paradox-laden works of the 20th-century moderns. As for fiction, on the whole, and for the same reasons, it interested them much less.

WHATEVER ITS drawbacks, the New Criticism performed a salutary and necessary task in the cultural life of American universities, rescuing art from the various "agendas," especially political, with which it had been saddled. It also offered two practical advantages which ensured its academic success for nearly twenty years. First, it was an easy method to teach. A bright student who knew little history, no philosophy, and no foreign languages could learn to analyze literary structures in terms of a small number of technical concepts. After that, nothing more was needed than a good anthology (Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* began its long, lucrative career in 1938), a supply of paperbacks, and perhaps, for the adventurous, a subscription to the *Kenyon Review*.

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Second, having gone on to a Ph.D., the same student could set up as an acolyte at one of the brand-new state universities and write critical essays by night while teaching even more ignorant students the same method by day. The whole cycle could be completed without any research library to speak of—a crucial advantage at a time when higher education was growing explosively and serious criticism, like other aspects of intellectual life, was coming to be more and more centered on campuses.

Then came the late 60's—by which time, as Mark Royden Winchell notes in his exhaustively detailed biography of Brooks, the New Criticism had already begun to seem "passé." This was not, Winchell goes on to argue, "because it had been replaced by a monolithic newer criticism." Rather, in his view, the New Criticism simply succumbed to a series of challenges by "approaches that had nothing in common except their differences with [it]."

Actually, the relation between the New Critics and those who succeeded them is at once simpler and more complicated than this suggests. The New Criticism was followed by a number of complicated theoretical doctrines: structuralism, deconstruction, and, the latest, "cultural studies," a still-evolving neo-Marxist method for "decoding" literary and other cultural artifacts. Cumulatively, their greatest effect on literary study has been to overthrow the central tenet of the New Criticism—the autonomy of art—and in its place to institutionalize the social and political attitudes of the New Left, turning the practice of criticism into a weapon of assault against such extramural targets as American foreign policy, capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.

ALL THESE doctrines do indeed seem remote from the New Criticism, which really was what it claimed to be: a method for studying literature. But the mere fact that the English department of Yale changed in a decade and a half from a bastion of the New Criticism into a stronghold of deconstruction suggests a greater degree of continuity than either side would like to acknowledge. Essentially, the link lies in their shared emphasis on the notion of literary "texts" (a cult word in contemporary criticism) as systems of codes and, consequently, on the supreme importance of the critic as cryptographer. The difference is that while the New Critics denied that literary language makes true or false statements about reality, deconstructionists (and other poststructuralists) deny that *any* language does so.

Words, say the new theorists, are only about words, and everything else is interpretation. This can be taken very far indeed: Stanley Fish, a doyen of the poststructuralists, asserted recently in the *New York Times* that not only literature but even science is less a discipline for discovering objective truth than a set of arbitrary rules or a merely self-referential game, like baseball. Fish took his Ph.D. at Yale in 1962, while the New Critics were still riding high.

Winchell strives to keep the distinctions between the New Critics and the poststructuralists bright, saying at one point that while the differences "may seem to be only ones of degree, . . . that is like saying that the difference between conjugal love and promiscuity is only one of degree." But even he is compelled to admit that the New Critics' embrace of the nonreferential text led them to place a foot experimentally on the top edge of a slippery slope, which (I would argue) opened the way for more radical forms of subjectivism. It would not be the first time that a movement gave birth to a mutation that proved to be a nemesis.

AND NOW? Does the publication of a sympathetic study of the movement's chief figure signal that the worst period of obloquy is coming to an end? It is hard to say; but other recent omens suggest that certain core elements of the New Criticism, having gone around, may be coming around. Some influential critics, for instance, are once again talking about the autonomy of art, and about "literariness" as a valuable concept. Even Stanley Fish conceded in a 1993 essay that "There is a great difference between trying to figure out what a poem means and trying to figure out which interpretation of a poem will contribute to the toppling of patriarchy or to the war effort"—and then, perhaps surprisingly, went on to recommend the former approach.

Other signs include the publication, also in 1993, of a book entitled *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism*. In it, the author, Steven Knapp, cautiously declared:

> The object of literary interest is a special kind of representational structure each of whose elements acquires, by virtue of its interconnection with other elements, a network of associations inseparable from the representation itself.

Or to put it more simply, a literary work is a complicated, unparaphrasable aesthetic structure.

A year later, Harold Bloom, another well-known Yale professor, published a massive book, *The Western Canon*, defending that unfashionable entity against various leftist ideologues whom he collectively dubbed the "School of Resentment." Just a few months ago, Frank Lentricchia of Duke, who formerly reveled in being known as the "Dirty Harry of literary theory," publicly changed sides and embraced the belief that "literature is pleasurable and important, as literature, and not as an illustration of something else." And in an article this past summer entitled "The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature," Richard Rorty, the fa-

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vorite philosopher of many academic leftists, attacked cultural studies and seconded Bloom's reminder of the importance of great literature (although not without some ritualistic bashing of conservatives to show that his heart was still in the right place). Finally, and perhaps most indicative of all, an organization, the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, has come into being with the stated mission of restoring the study of literature as an art in its own right, distinct from politics and sociology.

One can only hope that these portents amount to more than small straws in a gale. At its best, the New Criticism taught a vast number of students to read better, and succeeded for a while in preserving the political neutrality of academic criticism. Though it was in some ways a narrow and unsatisfying doctrine, in our present ideological climate its partial rehabilitation would be a wholly welcome thing. "[I]t is the examination of the work itself that seems to me to have the best claim to be called a specifically 'literary' criticism," an unrepentant Cleanth Brooks wrote late in his career. Nobody ever gets the last word in this kind of controversy, but Brooks's conviction seems less obsolete than it did a decade ago.

Movies

Lights, Camera, Shakespeare

Donald Lyons

It is sometimes foolishly asserted—recently, for example, by the critic Anthony Lane in the *New Yorker*—that Shakespeare "works" better on the screen than in the theater. Those knotty iambic pentameters can be spoken softly, and hence understood; soliloquies can be rendered as voice-overs, and hence made dramatically plausible. But if theater conventions are artificial and limiting, the same is true of film, which is hardly the transparent or naturalistic medium it may appear to be. And quite apart from the issue of technique, there is the issue of interpretation: fashions in filming Shakespeare reflect the day as dimly or as brightly as does the mirror of the stage.

We are now in the midst of a mild movie renaissance for the Bard, with four new movies of different plays having been released in the last months alone. On perhaps the grimmest level is the Australian director Baz Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which is actually titled *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*—no doubt to distinguish it from Garbage's *Romeo and Juliet* or Butthole Surfers' *Romeo and Juliet*, these being the names of rock bands heard, and heard more loudly than any Shakespearean verse, in the course of the film.

This is a hip-hop, MTV, quick-cut movie filmed in a Mexico City that has been made to resemble the Miami Beach of Brian De Palma's *Scarface*. We are in Verona Beach, where two rival gang families—drug kingpins, for all we know—rule the roost. Most of the characters seem Latino or black—Tybalt is a *muy macho* Latino hood, Mercutio a black drag queen—except for the two pretty leads (Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo, Clare Danes as Juliet) who are, mysteriously, quite white. The spoken text is admitted-

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ly Shakespeare's, but is more often than not drowned out by visual and aural static: jump cuts, purple twilights, underwater love scenes, gang weaponry, Romeo's LSD trips.

Even on its chosen turf—what might be called street Shakespeare—this *Romeo and Juliet* was bested long ago by *West Side Story* (1961) and, more recently, by Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). And by a sweet irony, the only intelligible and/or professional performances in the film are given by Pete Postlethwaite (as the friar) and Miriam Margulyes (as the nurse), both veterans of just the sort of classy British productions that it was the announced intention of the director to render obsolete. What Luhrmann has accomplished instead is to define Shakespeare down to the tastes of today's youth culture, a culture so corrosive that it dissolves anything it comes into contact with. How innocuous, by comparison, seems Franco Zeffirelli's mildly hippiefied *Romeo and Juliet* from 1968!

ANOTHER MISGUIDED attempt to make Shakespeare intelligible to the groundlings is *Looking for Richard*, directed by Al Pacino, starring Al Pacino, with narration written by Al Pacino. As it happens, the veteran actor has given himself over the years to Shakespeare productions, and quite patently would like to bring the Bard to the people. So he decided to film his efforts to get a film made of *Richard III*, assembling a cast of cronies and colleagues to discuss the text over spaghetti and donuts and then to dress up and perform it. These scenes of rehearsal and enactment are intercut with man-in-the-street snippets attesting to the incomprehensibility of English history and Elizabethan language alike, and with interviews of talking heads from England who range from a dotty Vanessa Redgrave to the insightful Oxford don Emrys Jones.

In all this there is a certain amount of silliness, vanity, and even bad faith but also a goofy geniality. In fact, the most interesting parts of the film are the theater people's confabs and bull sessions; we get to tour their kitchen, as it were, and see how they go about assembling a dish. But the resulting pudding is quite inedible. The few chunks we are given of the play itself, performed in period costume at the Cloisters in New York and somewhere in the countryside, look like a parody of the 1955 *Richard III* starring Laurence Olivier. Pacino's Richard lacks all grandeur and is sinister in a wholly traditional way; at his worst—when, say, he is bellowing "My kingdom for a horse!"—he sounds like something out of Damon Runyon. Supporting players like Winona Ryder (Anne), Alec Baldwin (Clarence), Aidan Quinn (Richmond), and even Kevin Spacey (Buckingham) rarely rise above the competent.

And so the film, basically a document confirming the obsession of actors with themselves, is finally left looking at its own navel. Despite its high-minded posturing about the Bard's essential communicability, *Looking for Richard* actually demonstrates the *in*compatibility of Shakespeare with a certain self-important American mode of communicating: namely, Method acting.

IN ADDITION to these two failures, however, the current season has also given us large, bright, intelligent, and relatively straightforward versions of *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*. Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* is the bigger of the two and is a film marked both by its ambitious effort to turn the play into a political epic and by its director-star's obsessive personal rivalry with his great predecessor Olivier.

Hamlet runs 3 hours and 58 minutes with an intermission. It incorporates every word of the text and has been filmed, *Lawrence of Arabia*-style, in wide-screen 70-mm. (The film was originally intended for release in a shorter version in 35-mm in most markets, but the plan was junked.) Fullness of scope, largeness of effect is what Branagh is after, and achieves: the 70-mm format makes possible an amazing sharpness of detail, and doing the entire text proves a good way to emphasize the play's historical range and sweep.

Branagh sets the story in an unspecified, late-19th-century Northern European kingdom. The men wear military uniforms with gold braid, epaulets, and decorations (red for King Claudius, white for Laertes, black for Prince Hamlet), smoke cigars, and swirl brandies; the women are dressed in corseted, cinched ball gowns. For the exterior of Elsinore, the movie uses Blenheim Palace, the vast seven-acre Baroque pile built by John Vanbrugh in the first quarter of the 18th century to commemorate Marlborough's military successes in Europe's dynastic wars. The film's principal interior, representing the State Hall, boasts a floor covered (according to publicity releases) in "7,500 handmade black and white tiles, each individually 'marbled'"; 30 mirrors line the walls, and a high gallery runs above.

These things are not incidental; they are of the essence. Branagh has inserted a family story into History, with a capital H, and at every possible moment keeps us alert to the bigger political and military picture that lies just behind the action—especially through recurring images of the menacing and armed Norwegian prince, Fortinbras. It is as if we were in a sort of St. Petersburg, on the eve of a sort of revolution, or perhaps in a sort of Leningrad on the eve of a sort of counterrevolution. (As in so many English filmings of Shakespeare, allusions to the comportment and look of the Windsors are also never far away.) The movie's final image is of a statue of old King Hamlet being pulled down by Fortinbras's army, a trope evocative of the fall of Communism and

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more generally of the inevitable defeat of tyranny and its no less inevitable replacement by a triumphant popular will.

Unfortunately for Branagh, however, *Hamlet*, unlike Shakespeare's Roman or English history plays, and unlike *Macbeth*, is a hard drama to historicize. That toppling statue, for example, misapplies the "end-of-history" motif to what was patently a seizure of power from a flawed but effective native dynasty by a hungry young foreign conqueror. But misappropriations of history are not the only problems with this sumptuous, strenuous, and generally smart movie.

Consider the question of the star's own suitability to the enterprise at hand. Branagh's personality floods his incarnation of the Prince, and that personality, though powerful, is not always appropriately so. Thus, in the movie Branagh sports (in addition to his blond Danish haircut) a ferocious scowl and a deep fund of cunning, inventiveness, and will. But he lacks charm or charisma, and this lack is serious.

A hard-faced, thin-lipped Northern Irishman, Branagh was much better suited to the title role in *Henry V* (1989), his first Shakespeare film as director-star. Henry, after all, is a calculating and cunning man of power who can, when necessary, *affect* charm or produce a viable simulacrum of grace. Hamlet, by contrast, is what Branagh himself has called a "400-year-old depressed aristocrat," and our steely man of action and egoistic daring is in essence miscast playing him. The movie's final scenes feature Errol Flynn-type heroics—a sword flies through the air to impale King Claudius, lithe Hamlet rides a chandelier from balcony to floor—and elsewhere we are shown Hamlet and Ophelia having at it in bed, in a scene that violates not only Ophelia herself (played by the beauteous and cliché-avoiding Kate Winslet) but the unambiguous statements in the text about her virginity. In both instances, no doubt, Branagh must have thought he looked awfully cool.

The real struggle in this movie, though, is not between the star and his role but between the director and his ghost, namely, Olivier. Branagh remade *Henry V* to refute the patriotic version done by Olivier during World War II (although in the end the text undid him: the film's best, most exhilarating moments are the St. Crispin's Day speech and the post-battle comradely bondings). Then he tried his hand at a romantic comedy, *Much Ado about Nothing* (1994), in which he and his co-star, Emma Thompson (to whom he was then married) seem to have set out to rival Olivier's only Shakespeare romance on film, an odd *As You Like It* made in 1936 with Elisabeth Bergner. And now there is *Hamlet*. Olivier filmed it in 1948, in black and white, as a Freudian *film noir*, camera thrusting up and down tubular stairwells, waves forever crashing beneath beetling cliffs, a very young and sexual queen mother: less History than the Cancer that Lurks at the Heart of the Family.

Other vivid Olivier performances include the *Richard III* mentioned earlier, which he also directed, and *Othello* (1965). It may be a while before Branagh tries his hand at *Richard III*—aside from Pacino's pastiche, there has been a recent film of the play starring Ian McKellen, in a 1930's stylization complete with tanks and cocaine and fascist decor. And it is safe to say that Branagh will not soon be impersonating Othello—no white male would dare to do so today. But he did play Iago in a mediocre 1995 version with Laurence Fishburne and stole the picture in what was a perfect role for him. And he has clearly not left off competing with his nemesis; he might do well to take on the arrogant title role of *Coriolanus*, which is suited to him and which Olivier did famously on stage.

Branagh's *Hamlet* has, however, the virtues of its defects. Its epic scale does capture something that is in the play, and is often neglected. And it is full of fine performances: Winslet's Ophelia; Julie Christie's dignified Gertrude; Derek Jacobi's crisp, sincere, plausible Claudius; even Branagh's own Prince, when the wind is north by northwest. But that brings us to Trevor Nunn's lovely *Twelfth Night*, a much more unqualified success. It too is a movie that flirts in passing with contemporary preoccupations, but in the end is content to know, love, and serve the Bard.

Nunn, the longtime head of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and recently appointed director of the Royal National Theater, has previously made two undistinguished films (*Hedda* and *Lady Jane*). This time he gets it right. He has set his tale in the same era as Branagh's *Hamlet*—a generic late-19th century—but his place, the mythical kingdom of Illyria, is much greener and more summery than Branagh's chilly Denmark. Nunn and his cinematographer Clive Tickner have cast a pre-Raphaelite glow over the film, which was shot along the wild coast and in the formal gardens of Cornwall. These settings work beautifully to complement the glow of the central story: a young woman impersonates a man and has to contend with both the attraction of another woman to her male persona and her own attraction to a man who treats her as a guy. Although the film exploits its erotic situations with a knowingness very much of the 1990's, Nunn resists every opportunity to turn sly flirtatiousness into campy gender-bending. Heterosexual decorum is teased but never "subverted."

The principals are also right on pitch. Imogen Stubbs, as the disguise-wearing Viola/Cesario, de-

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votes less energy to parodying masculinity than to showing the awkwardness of loving and being beloved in the wrong places. Helena Bonham Carter, a pillar of British costume dramas who herself played Ophelia in the not-bad 1990 Franco Zeffirelli/Mel Gibson *Hamlet*, makes a surprisingly animated, sexy, and likably foolish Olivia, smitten with Viola/Cesario. Toby Stephens as Orsino, who is besotted with the unreceptive Olivia and shares his fond confidences with an in-turn-besotted Viola/Cesario, engagingly presents the figure of a man who can combine authority and modesty. The final resolution of all these confusions is an immensely pleasing and deft piece of romantic cinema.

THIS IS a *Twelfth Night* that deserves to be seen and savored. And so, for all its missteps, does Branagh's *Hamlet*. The two plays had, in the trajectory of Shakespeare's career, some interesting connections. *Twelfth Night* was the last play of its kind, the last "festive comedy" he wrote; and it came right before *Hamlet*, which has been seen by scholars as a deliberate abandonment of comedy. As the critic C.L. Barber has noted, in *Twelfth Night* "the unnatural can appear only in outsiders, intruders who are mocked and expelled," whereas in *Hamlet* "it is insiders who are unnatural."

A mark of the playwright's genius was the ability to hold such antithetical ideas in so close and creative a tension. Likewise, a mark of good Shakespeare productions is to let his stories, ideas, and language breathe. By doing so, Kenneth Branagh and, especially, Trevor Nunn go some way toward redeeming the damage caused by the interposition of cute ideas—whether toxic, like Grunge Shakespeare, or relatively benign, like Method Shakespeare—between ourselves and the plays.

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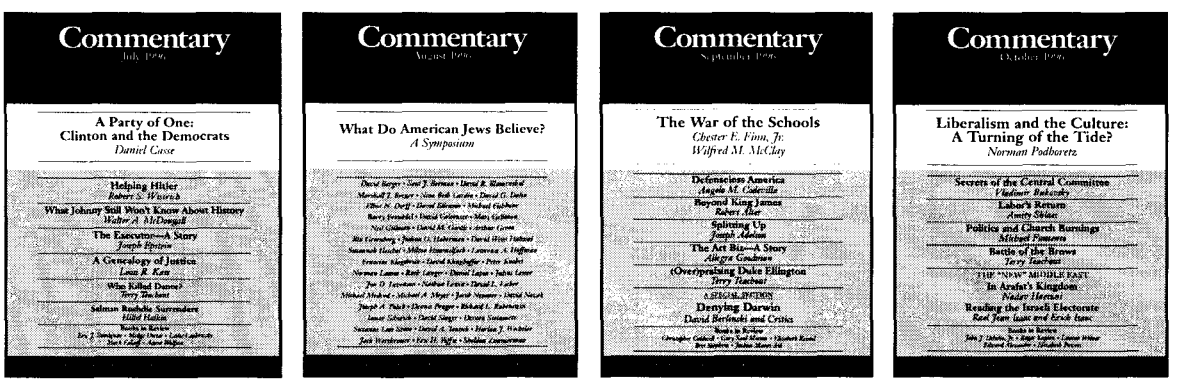

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Books in Review

Witness

Whittaker Chambers:
A Biography
by Sam Tanenhaus
Random House. 610 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Mark Falcoff

THE RECENT death of Alger Hiss makes the appearance of Sam Tanenhaus's book a particularly timely intellectual and political event. *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* bids fair, indeed, to become the last word on one of the longest-running controversies of the cold war.

In the steamy summer of 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a senior writer for *Time* magazine and a self-confessed former Communist, appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Under oath, he accused Alger Hiss of having been active with him in a Soviet espionage ring while Hiss was serving as a top State Department official in the second Roosevelt administration.

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On the face of it, the accusation seemed wildly improbable. Hiss, by then president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was an immaculately tailored establishment mandarin who kept regular company with the likes of Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles. Chambers, by contrast, was an unkempt, largely unknown journalist with, it seemed, a broad streak of paranoia. The contrast was brought into sharp relief when Hiss, appearing before HUAC at his own request to clear his name, struck a posture of elegance and self-assurance as he delivered responses both persuasive and witty.

At the time, only one Congressman—a first-termer by the name of Richard Nixon—detected certain false notes. To him, Hiss's statements seemed, as Tanenhaus confirms they were, "evasive and legalistic, as though he were laying a defense against some future charge of perjury." It was on this remarkably prescient hunch that Nixon convinced the committee to pursue Chambers's leads. Eventually, HUAC's (and Nixon's) persistence was rewarded by an indictment before a federal grand jury in New York.

After two trials, the first of which resulted in a hung jury, Hiss was convicted of perjury. Specifically, he was shown to have lied to both Congress and the grand jury when he said he had never known Chambers. He evidently lied as well by denying that he had participated in the transmission of top-secret State Department documents to his Soviet controller. For in the course of the HUAC investigation, Chambers came forward with microfilm copies of sensitive documents dating around 1938 and copied either in Hiss's handwriting or on a Woodstock typewriter which was later established to have belonged to him and his wife.

Had the trial taken place a decade or so earlier, before the statute of limitations on espionage had run out, these documents—the so-called "Pumpkin Papers," since they had been hidden in a pumpkin on Chambers's farm in Maryland—would have provided ample grounds for a conviction for spying. Not only did they contain information of extreme political and military interest, but once in Soviet hands—as former Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles revealed in his testimony be-

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fore HUAC—they would have provided Moscow's code-breakers "with text that could be matched against intercepted radio signals."

Hiss was sentenced to five years in a federal penitentiary on two counts of perjury, which the judge allowed to run concurrently. Released in late 1954, he worked as a salesman for a commercial stationery company in New York and labored with friends to get his sentence reversed. His most persistent claim was that Chambers or the government had somehow fabricated the Woodstock typewriter, which was the *pièce de résistance* of the government's case against him. In spite of an increasingly more sympathetic climate in both the media and the judiciary, Hiss never succeeded in winning a reversal—though he did succeed in obtaining reinstatement to the Massachusetts bar and the cultural luster of his "cause" led to such bizarre outcomes as a professorship being named in his honor at Bard College.

Meanwhile, Chambers, having brought down one of the New Deal's golden boys, and having embarrassed so many pillars of the establishment in the process, was pushed into the outer darkness. After a brief period of celebrity when his remarkable autobiography, *Witness*, appeared in 1952, he spent his final days in semi-obscurity as a senior editor at William F. Buckley, Jr.'s then-new journal, *National Review*. Chambers died in 1961.

UNTIL NOW, *Witness* was certainly the best book on the Hiss case. Apart from its extraordinarily high literary quality, no other source reconstructs so vividly the world of American Communism in the 1930's, and particularly that part of it conscripted into the service of Soviet espionage. What Tanenhaus does in this superb new biography is to widen the focus, interpreting the Hiss-Chambers controversy within the broader context of American political culture. The result is a monumental work of scholarship which benefits from a vast amount of new documentation, some of it made available as recently as two years ago. As such, *Whittaker Chambers* makes an invaluable contribution to the histories of American Communism, anti-Communism, and anti-anti-Communism. It is also as compelling to read as any espionage thriller.

Who was the obscure journalist who upset the political and cultural applecart of Truman's America? Whittaker Chambers was born in 1901 to a shabby-genteel and somewhat dysfunctional Wasp family. In spite of precarious financial resources, he was able to attend Columbia and study with the eminent literary critic Mark Van Doren. Almost from the beginning of his college career, Chambers showed a remarkable capacity to master foreign languages. After a couple of semesters he dropped out, first to tramp around Europe, then to work at the New York Public Library. He returned briefly to Columbia, passing his exams with distinction, but left again before graduation to join the infant American Communist party.

Putting his emergent literary skills to work, Chambers wrote for the *Daily Worker* and other party publications, including the *New Masses*, its literary journal. After a series of liaisons with various party women, he met and married Esther Shemitz, a young artist whom he had encountered at a party-organized textile strike in 1926. Quarreling with Jay Lovestone, then the maximum party *capo*, Chambers resigned from the *Daily Worker* and for the next few years earned a precarious living as a translator—bringing into English such writers as Felix Salten (*Bambi*), Heinrich Mann, and Franz Werfel. In 1931 he began to write fiction. One of his short stories, "Can You Make Out Their Voices?," remains a pinnacle of Communist fiction; turned into a play, it became a staple of the worldwide radical repertory, performed in Greek, French, Spanish, Russian, even Yiddish.*

Meanwhile, the Great Depression had catapulted the Communist party to the pinnacle of its cultural prestige. As the "hottest literary Bolshevik," Chambers was invited to become a member of the editorial board, and then editor-in-chief, of the *New Masses*, whose contributors now included such luminaries as Edmund Wilson, Katherine Anne Porter, and John Dos Passos. But not long afterward he was informed that he had been selected for one of the party's "special institutions"—institutions of which he, like most party members, was scarcely aware. In brief, he was invited to abandon his literary career and "go underground"—to become part of the Soviet espionage apparatus based in New York.

To this new assignment, Chambers brought unusual talents: an Ivy League education, a knowledge of foreign languages, and demonstrated courage, strength of character, and guile. Also, he was a Wasp at a time when the party was still largely made up either of foreigners or children of foreigners, many of them Jews. Chambers's "Americanness" made it possible for him to operate without attracting undue attention. More to the point, it made it possible for him to relate to the kinds of people the party was now attracting in Franklin D. Roosevelt's Washington.

Chambers was sent to live in Baltimore, where he would be in close proximity to the capital. There, Harold Ware, son of the famous Communist matriarch Ella Reeve ("Mother") Bloor, had already assembled an extensive covert network to photograph secret government documents and transmit them to Moscow, as well as to influence policy. The Ware group then had eight members, five with Harvard degrees, including both Alger Hiss and his brother Donald. In time, Chambers

* This story, along with another, "Our Comrade Munn," is reprinted in *Ghosts on the Roof: The Collected Journalism of Whittaker Chambers*, edited by Terry Teachout (Regnery Gateway, 1990).

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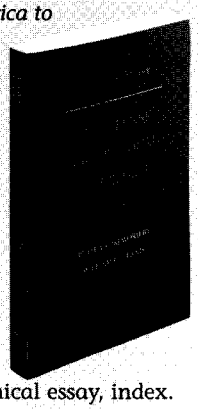

Meyer (1909-1972) insisted that liberty is the *sine qua non* of the pursuit of virtue. Therefore, he argued that the proper end of political thought and action is the establishment and preservation of freedom. The new Liberty Fund edition of Meyer's 1962 classic includes nine related essays, among them "Conservatism and Crisis," "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism," and "Libertarianism or Libertinism?" A bibliographical essay traces the polemical response to Meyer's writings.

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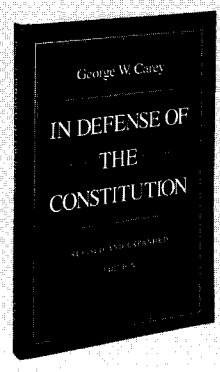

The author argues that modern exponents of Progressivism subtly distort fundamental principles of the Constitution for the precise purpose of centralizing political power in the nation's capital. In fact, in their distrust of self-government and representative institutions, contemporary Progressivists actually pursue an elitist regime based on the power of the Supreme Court, or judicial supremacy. Key phases and cases in the transformation of constitutional interpretation are thoroughly examined. George W. Carey is professor of Government at Georgetown University.

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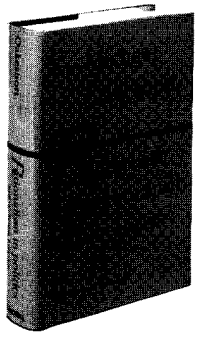

First published in 1962, *Rationalism in Politics* established the late Michael Oakeshott as the leading conservative political theorist in modern Britain. This expanded collection of essays astutely points out the limits of "reason" in politics. "Having cut himself off from the traditional knowledge of his society, and denied the value of any education more extensive than a training in a technique of analysis," Oakeshott argues, the Rationalist succeeds only in undermining the institutions that hold civilized society together. In this regard, rationalism in politics is "a corruption of the mind."

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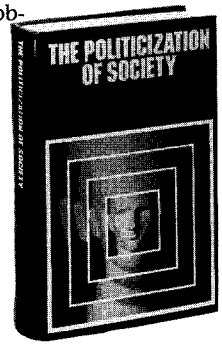
The Politicization of Society

Edited by Kenneth S. Templeton, Jr.



Fourteen essays explore the central problem of modern society—the decline of free institutions and the growth of the state. Contributors include Robert Nisbet, Jacques Ellul, Giovanni Sartori, Michael Oakeshott, Herbert Butterfield, F. A. Hayek, and John Lukacs.

544 pages. Introduction, sketches of contributors, index.

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was able to enlarge the group to include Franklin Victor Reno, a statistician working at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, a principal testing site for the U.S. Army; thanks to Reno, he conveyed to the Soviets a diagram of the Norden bombsight, a top-secret device. Small wonder that, what with figures like these, the Ware group's Soviet controller bragged that "we have agents at the very center of the government, influencing policy."

THE HUMAN drama of Chambers's conversion to Communism, his gradual disillusionment, and his eventual defection is but briefly summarized by Tanenhaus, possibly because his book—though never boring—was already very long, but also because the story has already been told in such vivid detail by Chambers himself in *Witness*. The proximate cause of his defection in 1938 appears to have been the Moscow trials and the purges that followed, a process whose ghoulish reach extended even to the Soviet espionage apparatus in the U.S. Chambers was alerted to the possibility of his peril by one summons to Moscow, another to Republican Spain, both of which he had the wit to disobey. As "the linchpin of an efficient espionage apparatus just reaching its maturity," Tanenhaus writes, Chambers knew too much—not only about agents at Treasury, State, Agriculture, the Aberdeen Proving Ground, and the National Bureau of Standards but about literally hundreds of smaller fry scattered throughout the government.

One day in 1938, Chambers failed to meet his Soviet controller at the scheduled time and place. He had disappeared with his family to a farm he had bought in rural Maryland, where they lived for a full decade. During those same years, he resurfaced as a writer-editor at *Time*, then at the apogee of its influence in American journalism. With the imminent entry of the United States into World War II, Chambers felt that he should tell the government what he knew, and through intermediaries was able to arrange an appointment with Adolf A. Berle, then a key adviser to FDR. Berle took Chambers's information to the President, who was frankly unimpressed; the FBI—then with its hands full chasing Axis operatives—was similarly uninterested.

IT WAS only after the war, with the breakdown of the Yalta accords in 1946 and 1947, that the authorities in Washington—and specifically the House UnAmerican Activities Committee—became interested in Chambers's information. The Republicans had recaptured Congress for the first time in more than fifteen years, and some were particularly anxious to use evidence of Communist infiltration of the Roosevelt administration to discredit the entire New Deal. The buffooneries and exaggerations of a number of these Republicans led even normally anti-Communist Democrats (including President Truman) initially to write off Chambers's assertions as nothing more than jagged-edged partisanship.

One particular strength of Tanenhaus's narrative is, indeed, to show how the Hiss-Chambers controversy was transformed from an argument over the facts of the case to a class war between America's patrician liberal establishment and its populist opponents. While the latter fired their rounds without much care or discrimination, often hitting the target in spite of themselves, the former refused to admit the possibility of error, and closed ranks around the accused. Hiss's character witnesses at his first trial included such notables as Adlai Stevenson, Justice Felix Frankfurter, and former Democratic presidential candidate John W. Davis. As the critic Leslie Fiedler put it astutely at the time in COMMENTARY,* Hiss, to his supporters, *had* to be innocent; for were he proved guilty, it would doom the "implicit dogma of American liberalism," namely, that in any political drama, "the liberal *per se* is the hero."

Thus, Tanenhaus writes, what set the Hiss case apart then, and continues to set it apart now, is not the mystery of what happened but "the passionate belief of so many that Hiss must be innocent no matter what the evidence." Even when Hiss was found guilty of perjury at his second trial (a trial which he himself had demanded), so deep were the strains of class loyalty that Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared to the press that he for one did "not intend to turn [his] back on Alger Hiss."

AFTER HISS'S death this past year, some media personalities suggested that he was one of the first victims of McCarthyism. This is very wide of the mark: in point of fact, Senator Joseph McCarthy began his career as a Red-hunter only after Hiss was sentenced. What is certainly true, however, is that Whittaker Chambers was the first important victim of anti-anti-Communism. When *Witness* appeared in 1952, the novelist and critic Mary McCarthy was outraged. "The great effort of this new Right is to get itself accepted as a *normal* part of publishing," she wrote indignantly to her friend Hannah Arendt, "and this, it seems to me, must be scotched, if it's not already too late."

But if Hiss's star has to this day remained undimmed in the eyes of his most ardent loyalists, he has not fared so well at the hands of historians and archivists. In the 1970's a young American historian, Allen Weinstein, undertook to gain access to the relevant records under the new Freedom of Information Act; though he set out expecting to find fresh evidence vindicating Hiss, at the end of the day Weinstein was forced instead to reverse his own assumptions and declare (in *Perjury*, 1979) that Hiss was, in fact, guilty.

The fall of the Soviet empire and the opening of Communist files

*"Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence," August 1951.

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reawakened curiosity about the Hiss case. In 1992, General Dimitri A. Volkogonov, chairman of the Russian government's military archives, announced that a search of KGB files had produced nothing to indicate Hiss had ever worked for Soviet intelligence, but within weeks the general backed off, admitting that his search had been cursory and that many relevant files had been destroyed. As Tanenhaus points out, however, some documentation on Hiss had turned up in Hungary, whence Noel Field, one of his State Department colleagues, had fled in 1949. In his debriefing by Hungarian agents, Field identified Alger Hiss as a fellow agent.

Moreover, State Department documents declassified in 1993 revealed that a security investigation in 1946 brought to light the embarrassing fact that Hiss had obtained top-secret reports he was not authorized to see—on atomic energy, China policy, and other matters relating to military intelligence. It was immediately thereafter that Hiss notified the Secretary of State that he would leave the government for the presidency of the Carnegie Endowment.

Finally, in the summer of 1995, the National Security Agency began to release the "Venona" traffic—more than 2,000 painstakingly decrypted cables sent over the decades from U.S.-based Soviet agents to Moscow. These, Tanenhaus writes, "confirmed that there had been a large espionage network centered in the federal government," and among the figures implicated was Alger Hiss. On the evidence, Hiss had remained a Soviet agent long after Chambers's own defection in 1938, and possibly up to the moment he was forced out of the State Department in 1946.

These facts affirm and reaffirm Whittaker Chambers's accusation to the House committee in 1948 that "Alger Hiss was a Communist, and may be [one] now." But I do not mean to suggest that Sam Tanenhaus's book is valuable only as a trenchant and, one hopes, definitive analysis of the Hiss case. It is that; but it is much more.

As Tanenhaus shows, Whittaker Chambers was a complex, contradictory, and in many ways troubled and troubling individual, one whose personality quirks invited (if they did not always justify) the skepticism of his critics. In his remarks to HUAC and at the two trials (as well as in *Witness*), he revealed a cloying penchant for self-dramatization, and a preference for apocalyptic rhetoric rather too rich for the tastes of ordinary people. Even more puzzling, he harbored a deep fondness for the Hisses as people—he and his wife had been their friends

IN DEFENSE OF IMMIGRATION

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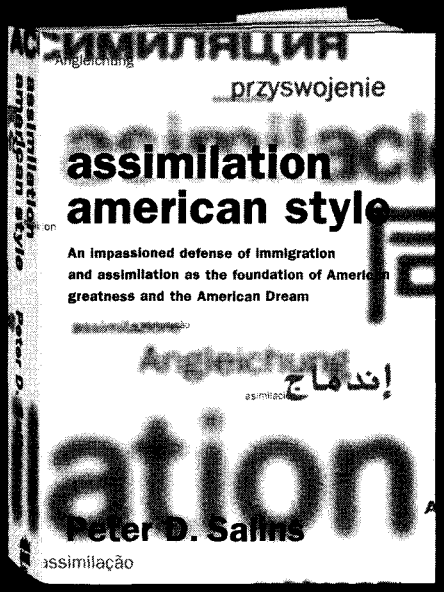
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as well as comrades, and in 1938 he attempted to persuade them, without success, to join him in abandoning the Soviet cause.

In short, Whittaker Chambers was one of the deepest, knottiest, and most enigmatic characters of our age. In this riveting full-length portrait, Tanenhaus gives us the whole man, warts and all—while showing that, covered as he was with those warts, Whittaker Chambers spoke the truth.

Protocols

The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy

by Daniel Pipes

St. Martin's. 404 pp. $45.00

Reviewed by
Joseph Shattan

The Hidden Hand is a remarkable work of scholarship. Daniel Pipes, the editor of the *Middle East Quarterly* and a specialist on Arab affairs, has pulled together an enormous body of writing from a broad array of sources—journals, memoirs, speeches, and sermons—to illuminate a salient aspect of Middle Eastern political reality: the pervasive belief in Muslim and Arab society that conspiracies and secret dealings—a "hidden hand"—lie behind much of what happens in the world, and that these explain the relative superiority of Israel and the West. "Analyzing the region without taking [belief in] the hidden hand into account," writes Pipes, "is comparable to studying the American economy without Wall Street or Soviet politics without Marxism-Leninism."

One of the more enduring convictions examined in *The Hidden Hand* is that the state of Israel is following a secret plan, inspired by the Bible, to expand across the Middle East and usurp Arab lands. As early as 1937, Saudi Arabia's King Saud confided to a British diplomat that

> the Jews contemplate as their final aim not only the seizure of all Palestine but the land south of it as far as Medina. Eastward also they hope some day to extend to the Persian Gulf.

In subsequent decades this same claim has been repeated thousands of times, often by those occupying the highest offices of state, and without the slightest concern for evidence that might support or refute it. Thus, the presidents of both Syria and Iran have asserted recently that the entrance wall of Israel's parliament, the Knesset, bears an engraved message: "The Land of Israel from the Euphrates to the Nile." That the assertion is easily disproved lessens not at all the certainty with which it is advanced.

Indeed, as Pipes shows, a more detailed exposition of the same idea is a staple of Yasir Arafat, chairman of the PLO. Speaking before the United Nations Security Council in 1990, Arafat claimed to have irrefutable proof of Israel's intentions. "Please allow me to show you this document," Arafat told the assembled diplomats, and then displayed an Israeli coin which bore on its face what he described as a "map of Greater Israel." The coin, Arafat declared, demonstrated Israel's intent to annex

> all of Palestine, all of Lebanon, half of Syria, two-thirds of Iraq, one-third of Saudi Arabia as far as holy Medina, and half of Sinai.

In fact, however, the coin which served as Arafat's prop had been patterned after one minted by King Mattathias Antigonus II in 37 B.C.E., and the image on it bore only the vaguest resemblance to a map of the Middle East.

The Hidden Hand contains a rich inventory of similarly wild conspiracies that never were. But it is far more than a compendium of paranoid ideas. It raises, and proceeds to answer, a number of crucial questions. Why are the countries of the Arab world and Iran so prone to this style of thinking? Why do most of the conspiracies in circulation seem to center on the allegedly nefarious doings of Zionists and imperialists? And, finally, do the political leaders who spin such tales of intrigue actually believe in their own spurious words?

The burgeoning trade in conspiracy theories is, Pipes observes, a relatively recent phenomenon in the Arab world, one rooted in a reaction to civilizational decline. Ever since Napoleon conquered Egypt in 1798, Arabs have been burdened by a sense that history has somehow gone terribly awry: as the despised West sets the pace and dominates, they lag ingloriously behind. Conspiracy theories allow those who purvey them to cast blame for the ignominy away from themselves and onto powerful "others."

As for the actual content of the conspiracy theories which have proved most persistent, it derives, ironically enough, from the European West. In Europe's own tradition of conspiratorial thought, Jews were often the main scapegoats, and so it is not hard to understand how, along with everything else that came to the Middle East in the age of European imperialism, the figure of the Jews, in the form of Zionists and Israelis, should have begun to assume diabolical proportions in the imagination of many Muslims. To take just one example of how a European myth has been, in Pipes's apt phrase, "preserved in amber," the turn-of-the-century Russian forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is not only cited by title in Article 32 of the charter of the Islamic fundamentalist group, Hamas, but has gained wide currency throughout the Arab world.

Whether Middle Eastern leaders

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truly believe in the often bizarre propositions they posit is ultimately difficult to say. Pipes argues that conspiracy theories are spun for a wide variety of reasons, foremost among them the need, or the impulse, to manipulate the Arab masses. But "routinized repetition," he adds, "has a cumulative effect." Both rulers and ruled come, in the end, to accept their own lies as fact.

The consequences of this are by no means innocuous. For one thing, the widespread conviction in the Arab world that Israel is engaged in a conspiracy to dominate the region transforms the Jewish state into an entity with which, by definition, one cannot coexist. For another, the deeply ingrained habit of blaming all ills on Western and Jewish intrigues encourages political irresponsibility at home. As Pipes puts it, "conspiracy theories obstruct modernization itself," and prevent the inhabitants of the Muslim world "from achieving the advancement they crave." In this enlightening study, he shows just how deeply the problem lies, and how thoroughgoing a mental revolution will be required to address it.

The Money Tree

Narcissism and Philanthropy: Ideas and Talent Denied
by Gerald Freund
Viking. 158 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Leslie Lenkowsky

PHILANTHROPY, OSCAR WILDE once observed, is "the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow creatures." To judge by his new book, the historian Gerald Freund would probably agree. Foundations today, in Freund's view, are increasingly failing to "harness and inspire the best talent" in the arts, sciences, and humanities. Instead, they use the vast sums at their disposal to foist their own not always very good ideas on everyone else—hence the "narcissism" in the title of this book.

Freund is by no means the first person to level criticism at the philanthropic world. A large body of work finding fault with the motives and methods of foundations has accumulated since their earliest days, when John D. Rockefeller himself was accused of using charity to burnish his own, rather blemished, name. Since then, critics from Left, Right, and Center have regularly charged foundations with an array of practical and ideological sins, and some would-be grantees have even discovered that among the more effective tactics for winning a beneficence is to bite the hand they hope will feed them.

Freund's critique, expressed in respectful tones, is not of the biting variety. What makes it noteworthy, however, is that for 40 years, he himself was fed by one philanthropy or another, not as a grantee but as an insider and an executive. In fact, Freund was present at the creation of one of the most widely discussed foundation initiatives in recent decades, the so-called "genius" awards program of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

IN *Narcissism and Philanthropy*, Freund examines the degree to which foundations today are or are not fulfilling their ostensible goal of providing a source of "venture capital" to help society solve its most pressing problems. Comparing what such major donors as the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations managed to accomplish in their halcyon years with what they do today, he reaches the not entirely surprising conclusion that they have "a long way to go." Although he is less forthcoming with specific examples of deficiencies than he might be, es-

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"This is unquestionably the very best book yet written on life and education in a ghetto school."
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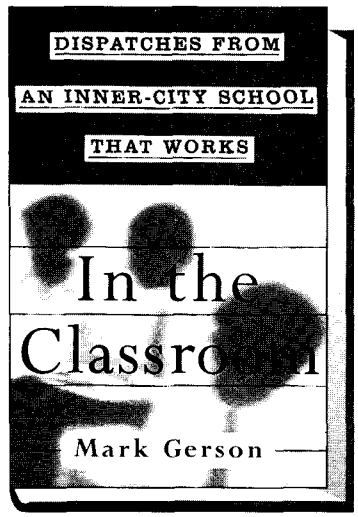

"Gerson's methods were unconventional, and he proved gutsy.... [His] chapter-by-chapter recitations of what his students believed, and what he taught them... are priceless."
—John J. DiIulio, Jr., *The Weekly Standard*

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pecially considering how much he knows, Freund's portrait of these institutions will be familiar to anyone who has tangled with them. Just about everywhere, rigid funding guidelines, shallow staff members, frequently changing priorities, cumbersome application and reporting procedures, and aversion to risk have become the norm. To add insult to injury, staff members and trustees frequently display a degree of arrogance that only prolonged exposure to riches of someone else's making could have spawned.

Ranging over all this and more, Freund reserves his sharpest criticism for what he calls the "democratization" of contemporary philanthropy, by which he means the rise of affirmative-action-type considerations in the awarding of grants. Instead of seeking outstanding individuals, many foundations, he complains, have come to accept the notion that financial support should be distributed more equitably, so that members of racial and ethnic groups who might otherwise have been left out get their fair share. But "[f]oundation missions are betrayed," laments Freund, "when they make a foolish virtue of egalitarianism and a useless myth of excellence."

How then can grant-makers mend their ways? For one thing, according to Freund, donors, trustees, and staff should avoid advancing "political agendas" of their own. For another, trustees should rely more on professional staff in making decisions, and staff members, in turn, should view their role as *actively* "scouting" for grantees and fostering their work, rather than seeing themselves as bureaucrats opening and closing the door of the treasury when supplicants come a-knocking. A third suggestion is that experts be employed to evaluate requests and that funded projects be rigorously followed up, with the results, for better or worse, reported candidly to the public.

Perhaps most importantly, philanthropists, in Freund's view, need to regain confidence in themselves as a cultural elite with a moral mission. In contrast to the "golden age" of American philanthropy, when foundations were run by worldly-wise men like Robert Maynard Hutchins and Warren Weaver, "foundation personnel . . . lack a moral reference point for recognizing exceptional individuals." Only by reestablishing such a reference point, and accepting the responsibilities that inevitably come with the stewardship of great wealth, Freund suggests, can philanthropists again become more than mere annoyances to the body politic.

BY THE standards of the foundation world, all this amounts to a far-reaching critique. Yet by the very evidence Freund provides, it is not far-reaching enough. For while today's foundations clearly do suffer from a kind of political "narcissism," they can hardly be said to lack a moral viewpoint, however superficial and self-referential it may be.

As is suggested by the widespread insistence on spreading grant money around in accordance with racial criteria and—as Freund occasionally acknowledges—the dictates of a rampant political correctness, the real problem afflicting those within the philanthropic universe is not their failure to behave as an elite. The problem is that that they reflect all too accurately the narrow and wrong-headed standards of the very elite from which they spring.

Freund proposes that philanthropists should concentrate on nurturing talented people within such broadly defined fields as writing or music. But talent does not exist in a vacuum. Any assessment of its merits relies upon a moral, political, and aesthetic judgment of the purposes to which talent is put. The MacArthur "genius" awards, pioneered in part by Freund himself, offer a lesson in the consequences of misunderstanding or ignoring this point. Designed to provide no-strings-attached funding over several years to people of exceptional talent in a wide variety of fields, the prizes, more often than not, have been awarded to a politically-correct assortment of grantees pursuing politically-correct—and often mediocre, when not downright chowderheaded—projects.

In short, Freund's recipe for reform—rejiggering the relationship between staff and trustees, new proactive ways of scouting for talent, and so on—will hardly suffice to address the issue at hand. That issue, to repeat, is not merely the narcissism and quest for influence of those who run foundations, but the ends they seek and the methods they employ to attain them. Unless and until this changes, Oscar Wilde's *mot* will continue to hold true.

The Chosen Lobby

Jewish Power:
Inside the American
Jewish Establishment
By J. J. Goldberg
Addison Wesley. 422 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Marshall J. Breger

THE JEWISH community has flourished mightily in the United States, a nation in which rabbis are invited to bless not only presidential inaugurations but also, on occasion, yachting regattas. But the past decade or so is likely to be seen as the apogee of American Jewish power. The Jewish cultural moment appears to be over—a stable of new Bellows, Malamuds, and Roths has

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not materialized. Jewish electoral clout—based upon a concentration of voters in key states—has begun to dissipate as Jews move to the South and Southwest. Intermarriage and assimilation have begun to reduce Jewish numbers, both proportional and absolute. And finally, the increasing balkanization of America has brought other ethnic interest groups to the fore with appetites of their own to be sated.

There is undoubtedly a serious book to be written about all this, and in particular about the waxing and waning influence of organized Jewry in the political arena. But *Jewish Power* by J.J. Goldberg, a contributing editor of the English-language Israeli magazine, *Jerusalem Report*, is not it.

To be sure, *Jewish Power* contains some of the ingredients which might go into such a work. For one thing, it ranges widely over its subject, with chapters on the origins of Jewish "defense" organizations, the activities of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), relations with Israel, the role of American Jews in the collapse of the USSR, and so on. And apart from providing a trove of anecdotes on all these matters, Goldberg also has a thesis and a point of view. But these, unsupported by facts and conditioned by an instinctive left-wing bias, prove to be the book's undoing.

Jewish Power contains two central ideas. The first revolves around what Goldberg describes as a "perception gap." While most Jews, he maintains, do not believe themselves to be part of a politically influential community, organized Jewry is nevertheless extremely powerful, "a serious player in the great game of politics, able to influence events . . . to reward its . . . friends and punish its enemies."

Is this so? In *Jewish Power* the organized community is both omnipresent and omnipotent. For example, if 50 percent of the Democratic party's political funding comes from Jewish donors, this to Goldberg suggests that the party is virtually a pawn in Jewish hands. According to him, Jewish electoral clout brought down George Bush in 1992, and even the course of Japanese diplomacy in the Middle East has been shaped by the activities of American Jewish leaders.

There are several problems with this. One of them is that Goldberg has confused the power of individual Jews with "Jewish power." Much of the money flowing into the coffers of the Democratic party does indeed come from Jewish donors, but it has nothing to do with advancing Jewish causes *per se*. And as for Goldberg's claims of far-reaching Jewish influence in other spheres, these appear to be based on nothing more than the self-aggrandizing press releases routinely issued by the public-relations departments of Jewish organizations. Goldberg, indeed, seems to have assembled a voluminous collection of such materials, and to believe every word in them.

The true extent of Jewish power is something else again. A more balanced appraisal than Goldberg's would show that American Jews have been successful in advancing their interests, as Jews, primarily when they have powerful allies or face no direct opposition. Thus, the campaign in the early 1970's for the Jackson-Vanik amendment, linking trade benefits for the USSR to Jewish emigration, reflected a coincidence of interests between Jewish groups and cold-war hawks. Even the community's vaunted success at securing American economic and military assistance for Israel has depended less on the proficiency of its own lobbying efforts than on the pro-Israel sentiments of American Christians who constitute, in the words of Rabbi Joshua Haberman, Israel's secret weapon in the heartland.

Tohfaxán with her troup of Sázadas, 1957.
Photo from *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God.*

The Hundred Thousand Fools of God
Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)
Theodore Levin
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While unquestionably influential for its size, the organized Jewish community cannot match the clout of such lobbying powerhouses as the American Association of Retired Persons or the American Medical Association. When organized Jewry challenges the business community (as AIPAC did in the fight over the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia), or runs up against an American President (as AIPAC and other organizations did with George Bush in the battle over loan guarantees for Israel), it has failed at least as often as it has succeeded.

GOLDBERG'S SECOND idea is that American Jews, for all their political strength, are ill-served by the organizations that speak and act in their name. In particular, Goldberg faults what he describes as the new Jewish leadership which rose to prominence in the 1980's; it is not, he contends, truly representative of American Jews, and, to make matters worse, it has given up "high-minded principle" and the pursuit of "equality, tolerance, and social justice" for a far less attractive, "neo-conservative" set of values, namely, the self-interest of Jews and Jews alone.

In criticizing the supposedly unrepresentative nature of American Jewish leadership, Goldberg echoes a traditional populist plaint, one that goes back at least to Rabbi Stephen Wise's attack in the second decade of this century on the self-styled "Our Crowd" elitism of the German Jews who had formed the American Jewish Committee. Whatever its relevance then, the critique has long been rendered moot by the welter of groups that have sprung up to fill the Jewish public square and to represent virtually every point of view that wishes to be represented.

But the other plank in Goldberg's indictment is the one he is truly passionate about. Thus, he writes caustically that American Jewish leaders not only are tied too closely to the present government in Israel, but exhibit excessive "loyalty to the Jewish people, commitment to its survival, and hostility toward its enemies." In short, American Jewish leadership cares too much about Jews.

Would that it were so. With respect to Israel, Jewish organizations in the United States tend to treat new Israeli governments (be they Labor or Likud) according to the precept long sanctioned by the British: the king is dead, long live the king. Admittedly, there are exceptions to this rule, but if anything, the major Jewish organizations favor Labor governments over Likud; they have certainly not forged close links with Benjamin Netanyahu's new administration in Jerusalem.

As for Goldberg's tirade on the organized community's supposed abandonment of its pursuit of "the public interest" for the crabbed terrain of "parochial" Jewish concerns, it is so far from the truth as to border on the ludicrous. An inventory of policy statements and resolutions issued by major Jewish organizations would reveal a very different picture. On matters ranging from abortion to "comparable worth" to saving the whales, Jewish agencies have engaged in an activism that often has little to do with Jewish concerns, and everything to do with promoting the agenda of contemporary liberalism.

Goldberg is not satisfied by any of this. The interests of American Jewry would be served, he believes, only if Jewish organizations redoubled their efforts to advance "a traditional American Jewish message of compassion," and did so in conjunction with the New Deal coalition of blacks, trade unionists, intellectuals, and Protestant church groups. To judge by what has happened in American politics in recent years—the New Deal coalition has drifted sharply to the Left and faded in strength while the center has shifted to the Right—Goldberg's is a formula not for Jewish power but for political irrelevancy. With all the other currents causing Jewish influence in the United States to dwindle, this is one formula the community could do without.

If Only . . .

Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of the German Resistance

by Joachim Fest
translated by Bruce Little
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Reviewed by
Josef Joffe

GERMANS HAVE long harbored a strange ambivalence toward those of their countrymen who tried to kill Hitler. The Left never forgave the plotters their aristocratic background; the Right could never stomach the fact that saving the Fatherland also required acts of high treason.

Never mind that most of the names of those involved—Tresckow, Kleist, Moltke, Stauffenberg—read like a "Who's Who" of Germany's finest. Never mind that these were martyrs who "cleansed our German name of some of the shame Hitler has cast on it," as Theodor Heuss, the first president of the postwar Federal Republic, would put it. The Left saw them as reactionaries who at first had happily sided with Hitler and later fought not for a pure liberal democracy but for their own class privilege; allegedly, they tried to get rid of Hitler not for noble moral reasons but in order to gain a last-minute deal with the Allies. On the

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Right, as late as 1986 the revisionist historian Andreas Hillgruber was asking how anybody could "contemplate a *putsch* in the face of catastrophe—while East Prussia was about to fall to the Red Army?"

Today, the Stauffenbergs and Schlabrendorffs, the "Men of the 20th of July" as they are known in the German vernacular after their attempt to assassinate Hitler on that date in 1944, are safely ensconced in the pantheon of postwar German democracy. Schools and army barracks have been named after them; the Plötzensee prison in Berlin, where many of them were butchered in 1944, has become something of a national shrine. We also know a great deal about the plotters themselves—from the diaries both of those who died and of those who survived, from accounts written by family members, and from dozens of scholarly and journalistic treatises.

So why read yet another book about the German resistance? The answer comes in three parts. First, anything by Joachim Fest is required reading, especially when he is ranging across the twelve years of the "Thousand Year Reich." His *Hitler* (1973, English translation 1974), a magisterial biography, is still the best single volume on the man who came out of nowhere to pervert the course of 20th-century history. And Fest's earlier book, *The Face of the Third Reich* (1963, English translation 1969), is an indelible portrait of the personalities who gave form to the entire Nazi period.

Second, Fest—the long-time co-editor of the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper—is a writer of extraordinary breadth and talent. He has something to say, and he knows how to say it. To Clio's craft, he brings a fine eye for atmosphere, personality, and nuance, and a pen that extracts engrossing drama from the barren facts that are but the historian's raw material. So it is with *Plotting Hitler's Death*. Over time, the conspirators have become remote, statue-like figures; Fest (aided here by the felicitous translation of Bruce Little), returns them to life in an almost literary manner, confronting us not only with their heroism but also with their strange diffidence. We meet men who withstand endless torture—and others who willingly betray their comrades. We learn about their ideals and ideologies, their agony and their confusion. To my knowledge, no other author has rendered such a finely-etched portrait of the men who tried and tried—and failed and failed.

Third, the drama of the German Resistance still has no real denouement; there are many unresolved issues, especially today, when the old questions about German history have resurfaced with a vengeance. Take Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), a book that has suddenly reverted to the old answers of the 1940's and 1950's. The Holocaust, Goldhagen argues, could only have happened in Germany because the Germans were the way they were—infected, alone among the nations, by an "eliminationist anti-Semitism" that turned annihilationist when the time was ripe.

What, then, of the men who died so that history would have more to report about Nazi Germany than million-fold murder? Did they embody a different, a better Germany? Do they deserve their place in the German pantheon—or were they just a bunch of hapless amateurs retroactively beatified by a nation searching for even the tiniest morsels of moral worth?

Joachim Fest is not one to grind axes. Above all, he is dispassionate and subtle, as critical of the heroes of his tale as he is impatient with their detractors on the Left and on the Right. *Did* these representatives of the Prussian upper classes, as the Left has charged, only start priming their bombs in the summer of 1944, when anybody could see that the war was already lost? Not so. Fest's story begins in 1934, when, even as the Wehrmacht as a whole was succumbing to *Der Führer*, three leading figures of the resistance-to-be—Franz Halder, Henning von Tresckow, and Hans Oster—moved into opposition.* By 1938, at the height of Hitler's prestige and power, they were ready to strike—as they would be again in 1939.

But they did not strike—and this is where Fest's plot begins to thicken. If the conspirators represented the "better Germany," why were they so inept? Unlike Hans and Sophie Scholl, the heroic naïfs who led the Munich student-resistance circle known as the "White Rose," these men were trained warriors, part of an elite network with access to intelligence, arms, and secure communications. And yet, as Fest's narrative unfolds, the reader develops the sinking feeling that he is up against the Keystone Kops as filmed by Claude Chabrol.

Fest puts it more politely. The plotters were forever "impeded by their notions of tradition, morality, and good upper-class manners"; they were, therefore, "never really able to match the ruthlessness of the regime." Instead of single-mindedly focusing their energies on chopping off the head of the Nazi monster, they would debate, philosophize, and waver. Had they not sworn an oath of loyalty to the Fuehrer? Would they not betray the Fatherland even as they were trying to save it? Their story, one of idealism and self-sacrifice, is also one of incompetence and irresolution.

Consider a noble figure like Claus von Stauffenberg, chief of staff to the commander of the Reserve Army and the key figure in the attempted assassination. Stauffenberg was sup-

* Halder was Army chief of staff from 1938 to 1942; he was freed shortly before his scheduled execution at the end of the war. Tresckow rose to chief of staff of the Second Army; he killed himself after the failure of the July 1944 plot. Oster, eventually a brigadier-general, ran the central division of military intelligence; he was hanged one month before V-E Day.

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posed to detonate two bombs in the "Wolf's Lair" at Rastenburg in East Prussia where Hitler was meeting with his generals. But he armed only one of them. "Nobody knows," writes Fest, "why Stauffenberg did not place the second bomb in his briefcase," adding:

> What is clear, according to all experts, is that the inclusion of the second charge . . . would have magnified the power of the blast not twofold but many times, killing everyone in the room outright.

And thus Hitler, barely scorched, could claim that once more he had been saved by "divine providence."

Or consider Ludwig Beck, who had been Army chief of staff until 1938 and who was slated by the plotters to succeed Hitler after their coup. Trying to commit suicide when the plot failed, he fired his pistol twice but merely mangled himself, and had to be put out of his death throes by a sergeant of the detail that had come to arrest him. As Admiral Canaris, chief of military intelligence who would be hanged by the Nazis in April 1945, put it two days later to a friend: "That, my dear fellow, was not the way to go about it."

Could they have done better? Somberly, Fest notes that they *should* have. Had the plotters succeeded in killing Hitler in the summer of 1944 and somehow wrested an armistice from the Allies, the lives of almost five million German soldiers would have been spared over the next nine months—not to speak of millions of Allied and Jewish lives saved. Sympathetic to the plotters, rendering their disparate lives and motives in subtle detail, Fest ultimately offers a grim diagnosis.

Ironically, it mimics Goldhagen. There was, Fest implies, something irreducibly "German" about the would-be saviors—"deeply ingrained attitudes and behaviors that inhibited any kind of revolt." When one of the plotters, Ernst von Weizsäcker, was asked whether, if worst came to worst, he had a pistol, he replied: "I am sorry, but I was not brought up to kill anyone." As Fest writes:

> Virtually all the opposition groups . . . liked to think of themselves as above the concerns of the grimy everyday world, and that attitude seriously compromised their ability to accomplish anything.

FEST'S IS a melancholy tale, rendered sadder still by the failure of the West to understand, let alone help, the conspirators. As early as 1938, various emissaries of the resistance embarked on a "curious pilgrimage" to Paris and London. But the "French did not know what to make of a German who would warn a foreign power about the designs of his own government," and in England, Ewald von Kleist (whose son would later make an attempt on Hitler's life) met in vain with Chamberlain's diplomatic adviser Sir Robert Vansittart and also with Winston Churchill. The British, notes Fest, "could never free themselves of the suspicion that they were dealing with a bunch of traitors, or Nazis in disguise." The Americans were just as unreceptive.

Was it all in vain, then? Ironically, we have Hitler himself to tell us no. After the July 20 debacle, he wanted to stage a Stalinesque show-trial, with a few carefully chosen victims who would be crushed in front of the cameras and radio microphones. But then the hundreds of arrestees turned into thousands, and the key figures would not break. Instead of remorse and supplication, Count Schulenburg offered sheer defiance, telling the court:

> We resolved to take this deed upon ourselves in order to save Germany from indescribable misery. I realize that I shall be hanged, but I do not regret what I did and only hope that someone else will succeed in luckier circumstances.

Startled and frightened by the depth of the opposition, Hitler forbade any further reporting of the trials; not even the executions were to be publicly announced.

Nevertheless, Fest ends on a harsh note. In retrospect, he writes, the plotters' "inaction" weighs more heavily than their heroism—and makes them look like "nothing more than a passionate debating society." But is that all? In his introductory chapter, Fest himself offers a very different judgment. Their failure, he states there, "does not in any way detract from their memory or from the example they set."

And so the ambivalence Germans have always felt toward their would-be saviors turns out to be the most enduring part of the story, with Fest merely adding a new dimension to it. In his book, the plotters are neither traitors nor towering idols, neither lily-pure democrats nor retrograde Junkers. They are strange and tormented souls, spurred to act by the moral law even as they are reined in by a culture that exacts duty and obedience *über alles*. Fest would like us to like them, but he is too formidable a historian to succumb to easy typecasting. In the end, he offers only more ambiguity. Heroes? Yes. But quixotic ones, bumbling and indecisive. He might have added that history reserves its cruelest verdict for those who lack the competence of their convictions.

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